

Chamber, come down, and I will yield time to you, and you tell me, name me a single general that was a liberal, a successful liberal general throughout all the history of the world.

I defy you to name one, there isn't one. One has never existed. One will never exist. Liberal generals don't succeed, 535 micromanaging liberal generals certainly don't succeed. It's not Congress' business to micro manage war. It's our job to fund them and support them and equip our troops, field an Army and a Navy, and declare a war if the situation calls for it. We haven't done so since World War II.

That's our job in this Congress, and that's our constitutional limitations. We need to live by those limitations and not be busting our buttons believing that we can do something here that isn't getting done, maybe, to the satisfaction of the people on that side of the aisle or mine, for that matter.

But there is a tremendous amount at stake, and it is more than the lives that have been invested so far, those that have been lost so far. God bless them for that. Zach Wamp spoke well to that, but the destiny of America and the destiny of the free world and the destiny of western civilization are all on the line matched up against a belief that they are going to restore a caliphate and renew a 100 year-old conflict that has been taking place here in the war, here in the world for hundreds of years.

We have a western civilization belief, we believe in freedom, this has been a country that has been founded on Judeo-Christian principles. That's some of the foundation of our strength, free enterprise market economy is another one, belief in the rule of law, and the foundational principles that we have in this Constitution, all tied together, all at risk, all matched up against people that don't believe in freedom, people that believe in death, people that execute homosexuals and female adulteresses, by the way.

Many people on this side of the aisle have a different belief system. I don't know why they would want to ally themselves with the interests of those who want to restore the caliphate, stone women and execute homosexuals and destroy your freedom and your freedom of religion. All of that is tied up in the risk of this.

FIND WAYS TO COME TOGETHER ON IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ISRAEL) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, tonight we do something different. Tonight we may do something that may even be unprecedented. Tonight I am joined on the floor of the House by my distinguished gentleman and my partner from Long Island, the gentleman from

New York (Mr. BISHOP) and we will be joined by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. GILCHREST) and perhaps others.

Tonight, for the first time that I know of, Republicans and Democrats take to the floor of the House to discuss Iraq, but not to criticize one another about Iraq, not to beat each other up about Iraq, not to cast aspersions and blame about Iraq, not to talk about what divides us on Iraq, but to find ways to come together on Iraq.

I don't think that's happened before on this floor, but I do believe that the American people have an unquenchable thirst for Democrats and Republicans not to take the time of this Congress for sloganeering and name calling and the impugning of motives, but to take the time of this Congress to have an intellectual debate over those issues, to take the time of Congress to really honor those troops and our veterans, and to discuss not what is left and what is right, but to discuss the way forward.

The gentleman from New York knows that every time the people from our districts and the American people tune into C-SPAN, what they see are Republicans and Democrats arguing and fighting and criticizing, attacking each other's ideas, impugning each other's patriotism, impugning each other's motives. Tonight is different, because we are not going to discuss what separates us and divides us, but we are going to discuss what, in fact, can unite us.

War in Iraq has caused an outbreak of war on floor of the House of Representatives, and tonight we declare a ceasefire. For me, this is not just a professional obligation, but, for me, it is personal, for two reasons.

The first is that several days ago I made a phone call to the father of Matthew Baylis. He was killed in Iraq last week. It was small arms fire in Baghdad. I have no idea whether Matthew Baylis or Matthew Baylis himself was a Democrat or a Republican or an independent or perhaps not registered to vote.

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I don't care. I do believe that Matthew Baylis would want Republicans and Democrats to come together to talk about the way forward; that Matthew Baylis and those like him, who died in the service of his country, would want us to spend more of our time talking about moving our country forward than moving our country to the left or the right.

And the second reason that this is personal for me, Mr. Speaker, is because it's being organized by the House Center Aisle Caucus, which is a bipartisan group of 50 Democrats and Republicans who have come together, based on certain propositions. The first proposition is, we can disagree agreeably; that we can state our differences with-

out calling each other names; that we can debate the issues without having this Chamber sound like a fourth grade elementary school auditorium that's run amok.

And the other premise of the Center Aisle Caucus, Mr. Speaker, is that Democrats and Republicans will disagree on perhaps as much as 70 percent of the issues, which means we have a fundamental obligation to agree on the 30 percent that's left.

The problem is that even when we agree we haven't moved forward, because we've allowed our disagreements to paralyze areas where we, in fact, have consensus. And so the Center Aisle Caucus, which was sponsored, actually which was founded by the gentleman from Illinois, Congressman TIM JOHNSON, and me and the gentlewoman from Missouri, Congresswoman JO ANN EMERSON, and the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MOORE), the Center Aisle Caucus has been meeting on an ongoing basis to find areas of agreement. We recently met with the ambassador from Iraq to the United States, and he gave us some ideas.

Before I yield time to my friend from New York, I just want to focus on some of the principles that we do agree on.

If you would listen to the debate here on the floor of the House of Representatives, Mr. Speaker, you would think that there are actually Members of Congress who want us to lose in Iraq. There's not a single Member of Congress who wants us to lose in Iraq.

If you listen to the debate on the floor of the House, Mr. Speaker, you would think that there are actually Members of Congress who do not care about the lives lost in Iraq. There is not a single Member of Congress who has a callous disregard for the lives lost in Iraq.

You would think that there are two types of Members of Congress, either Members of Congress who want defeat or Members of Congress who want to be in Iraq forever. I don't know of a single Member of Congress who supports either option.

The fact of the matter is we are not the enemies, Democrats and Republicans. Americans aren't the enemies. The enemies are the people that we're fighting, and we need to focus on this.

And the Center Aisle Caucus has gathered and has endorsed several principles that we're going to discuss tonight, and I'll run through them quickly and then yield my time to the gentleman from New York.

Here are the shared principles that Democrats and Republicans who are interested in finding common ground have articulated:

Number one, we support our Armed Forces. We want to make sure they have adequate force protection. We want to make sure they have everything they need to keep them safe and keep them sound, and we want to bring them home as fast as possible.

Number two, we want to take care of our veterans. And I am so proud to announce on this floor tonight that earlier today the Appropriations Committee, which I have the privilege of serving on, unanimously, Republicans and Democrats, Democrats and Republicans, passed a \$109.2 billion package that addresses the critical health care and housing needs for our veterans. \$18 billion above last year's level and \$4 billion more than the President requested, and I hope that he will not veto that bill.

Our bill includes \$87.7 billion in crucial funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is a \$6.7 billion increase in discretionary funding over last year's level. That is the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration.

Our bill addresses the backlog in claims by adding 1,000 new claims processors, and that's going to help veterans who now wait an average of 177 days for the benefits they deserve. I am very proud that Democrats and Republicans today in the Appropriations Committee voted to take care of our veterans.

We agree that we need to secure Iraq's borders because there are too many reports that Syria and Iran are sending fighters and equipment and technology over those borders to make the situation in Iraq even worse, not resisting Iraq's sovereignty, and threatening our troops and Iraqi civilians.

We agree that we need to stand up Iraqi security forces because we cannot be there for a prolonged period of time. I would imagine that we all agree that we've all been there too long already, and so we need to find ways to stand up Iraq security forces, and we're going to discuss that tonight.

We agree that there's a need for regional change. We agree that the Middle East is a very dangerous place in the world, and we need to transform it, using all the tools in our toolbox, from a place where children are taught how to blow things up to a place where children are taught how to put things together.

We agree that Iran needs to be responsible, and we need to engage Iran with the carrot and the stick. And we're pleased that the administration, which had resisted having any talks with Iran with respect to what is happening in Iraq, in fact, held those talks recently.

And, finally, we want to defeat al Qaeda, and we are prepared to use all the tools in our toolbox to do that. Because it was al Qaeda in Afghanistan that launched the attacks on the United States which killed hundreds of Long Islanders, those represented by myself and those represented by the distinguished gentleman from Long Island, from New York's First Congressional District, Mr. BISHOP.

And on that I would be privileged to yield time to my colleague, the gentleman from New York.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. I thank Congressman ISRAEL for yielding, and I also thank him for organizing this special order, something I think that is long overdue. And let me also thank my friend and colleague from New York's Second Congressional District for his leadership role in the Center Aisle Caucus.

In a Congress that is, at times, bitterly divided along partisan lines, and that partisanship obscures the kind of discussion that we need to have on this issue as well as so many other issues, the Center Aisle Caucus stands for civility. It stands for honest and reasoned debate, and it stands for shared decision making. I say qualities that are often in short supply in this Chamber but qualities that are desperately needed, both in this Chamber and in our country.

Let me also start by offering my deepest sympathy and condolences to the family of Specialist James Lundin of Bellport in the First Congressional District, who also gave his life last week in Iraq. He represents, as you know, the 26th Long Islander to lose his or her life in the service of our great country in Iraq. His wake was today, and he will be buried tomorrow in Calverton National Cemetery.

And like you, Congressman ISRAEL, I called his father on Monday, and I spoke with his father. And one of the things that struck me was the remarkable dignity with which he and his family were dealing with what has to be unspeakable pain. It is that kind of dignity that we need to honor in the way we do our jobs, and it is that kind of dignity that we need to bring to what will hopefully be a fruitful discussion of how we move forward in Iraq.

And, as I say, this kind of debate is a debate that must take place. It must be an honest debate; and it must be a debate that, above all, is absent in the often inflammatory and pejorative characterizations of those who offer differing views. And we all engage, at one time or another, in these inflammatory characterizations.

As you said, Congressman ISRAEL, there is not a soul in this Chamber that does not support our troops. And, in fact, the evidence of that is over the course, the 4½ year course of this conflict, the fact that with overwhelming bipartisan majorities we have consistently given the troops each and every dime that this administration has asked for them and in some cases increased the amounts of money that we will make available to them.

We all want us to succeed in Iraq, in Afghanistan. We may have differing versions or different interpretations of what constitutes success, but that, again, is the kind of debate that ought to take place in a healthy and vibrant democracy.

But the debate thus far has been compromised, as you and others well know, when those of us who think that a time line is something that we ought to seriously consider. When that time

line is characterized as a surrender date, that obscures the kind of discussion that we need to have.

When those of us who believe that we must change course in Iraq, when that is characterized by the questioning of our patriotism, that obscures the kind of debate that we need to have.

When looking for time lines or looking for benchmarks or talking about the way in which we fund our troops is characterized as abandoning our troops, that's the kind of thing that obscures the kind of reasonable debate that we need to have.

And with respect to supporting our troops, my own view, and I think this view is shared by a great many in this Chamber, that the best way to support our troops is to put them in positions where they can succeed and get them out of positions in which they cannot succeed. And I think we all agree on both sides of the aisle that what has taken place thus far has put our troops in positions in which it has been very, very difficult for them to succeed. So that, if nothing else, motivates an impetus on the part of a great many of us to urge a change of course in Iraq.

I want to speak just for a second, Congressman ISRAEL, about one of the shared principles. And, by the way, those shared principles are the kind of principles that all reasonable people should be able to embrace and support. But one is the issue of standing up the Iraqi security forces. It is a subject about which we have spoken in the past, and I'm proud to be a cosponsor of the legislation that you have introduced, along with Chairman SKELTON, that would create, in effect, a one-for-one exchange; that for each Iraqi brigade or battalion that we stand up, we would withdraw one of our own.

I think that that kind of approach has several advantages. One, it would be true to the goal that the President himself has set out, and I believe set it out as going as far back as January of 2004, that as the Iraqi stand up we will stand down.

Since January of '04, we have spent about \$15 billion to train and equip and outfit Iraqi troops, and we have several hundred Iraqi troops right now in uniform under arms, and yet we continue to increase our own complement of troops.

I think it is a perfectly reasonable, sane, rational proposition that we impose obligations on the Iraqi troops; and as they step up to those obligations, we relieve our own troops of those obligations.

As I say, I think the legislation that you and Chairman SKELTON have filed and that, as I say, I am proud to cosponsor, I think that that is very reasonable legislation. I hope to see that legislation receive the kind of debate and discussion and attention that it ought to.

We're not done yet. As you know, we have a report coming to us in September; and at that point the Congress is going to need to make another set of

decisions. Hopefully, that kind of reasoned response to a situation that none of us can support in terms of how it has gone thus far is the kind of direction in which we need to head.

So, with that, I'm happy to yield back to you.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank the gentleman, and I appreciate his raising this issue of one for one, because I think it's a perfect example of Members of this body having different ideas that may make sense, trying to offer those ideas in the spirit of some compromise and reasonableness. Let's go into the basis of that one for one and explore it as a possible, not a way out, because Iraq is certainly complex and complicated, but at least one measure of improvement.

The President has said that, in the past, and has stated this publicly, that for every Iraqi that stands up, an American will come home or be redeployed. And he has said that on several occasions. On other occasions, we've heard that there are between 250,000 and 300,000 Iraqis that have been stood up. Well, the gentleman can help me do the math. If in fact there are between 250,000 and 300,000 Iraqis that have been stood up and if for every one that stands up an American is going to redeploy, how come 250,000 to 300,000 have not redeployed?

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The answer is in how you define "training" and what it means to say "stand up." In fact, go you take a look at the textbook definition of "training" in military terms, combat proficiency is what is important, and there are different levels of combat proficiency. If you are trained at level one combat proficiency, you are capable of fighting and winning convincingly anywhere in the world and you don't need any U.S. support. If you are trained at level two combat proficiency, you can fight and win almost anywhere in the world, but you need some measure of U.S. support, maybe some intel, maybe some reconnaissance assistance, maybe some logistics support. So if you take a look at the numbers of Iraqi forces that are actually trained at level one or level two combat proficiency, you will find that it is not 250,000 to 300,000 but far less. And the numbers ought not be repeated in a public forum, but far less than 250,000 to 300,000.

So the idea that we came up with was why don't we ask the President to report to the Congress on a monthly basis how many Iraqis have actually been trained at level one or level two combat proficiency, certify that to the Congress, and then we will redeploy an equivalent amount. Now, I am not suggesting that we withdraw that number necessarily. We might redeploy them to the borders so we can prevent Iran and Syria from inflaming the situation in Iraq.

The point is, Congressman BISHOP, that I don't claim to have all the an-

swers and I know that this isn't the perfect answer, but it is an idea that we have tried to set forward.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ISRAEL. I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. I think it is, as I said before, a perfectly reasonable idea but also one that represents, I believe, an imperative. I think even the most ardent supporters of our presence in Iraq must recognize the enormous strain that a prolonged presence in Iraq has placed on our Armed Forces, and I believe the most ardent supporter must recognize that it will be enormously difficult, if not impossible, for us to maintain that presence at the current level or even at the presurge level. And thus if there is a chance of bringing order to Iraq, it must in the long term rest with Iraqi security forces as opposed to our own forces.

And as I say, we have spent \$15 billion thus far, and I won't say we have little to show for it but we certainly don't have as much to show for it as I believe everyone in this Chamber would agree. So I think that of the shared principles, and I think they are all crucial and important, but I think this perhaps take prominence over all the others because if for no other reason, just the simple logistics of maintaining the troop presence we have given our current end strength is going to be enormously difficult, if not debilitating, on our Armed Forces.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman. And, again, this was just one idea.

And the true value of the Center Aisle Caucus and this kind of dialogue, this unprecedented dialogue, and civil dialogue between Members on both sides is that we all have good ideas and we have all been trying to advance those ideas. And it is so refreshing to be joined by three members of the other side of the Center Aisle Caucus who have been extremely constructive, who have been true leaders in trying to forge bipartisan alliances in order to move the country and the debate not to the left, not to the right, but forward. And I am very proud that we are joined by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) and the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS), and I know the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. GILCHREST) has joined us as well.

And I yield to the distinguished gentleman from Pennsylvania, a leader in the Center Aisle Caucus (Mr. DENT).

Mr. DENT. Thank you so much, Congressman ISRAEL and Congressman BISHOP, for helping to organize this Special Order tonight. I think the American people expect this much of us, that they like to see this type of civil, controlled dialogue where we are trying to rally around, I think, some shared principles that we can pretty much agree to, that we are talking about this in a proper tone, keeping the temperature down, so to speak.

And I think that that is what the public expects instead of all the sometimes hot air and noise and at times excessive partisanship that seems to be the public perception of how this institution operates far too often.

And I just want to take a couple of moments to commend you, Congressman ISRAEL, on something that you have shared with many of us who participate in the Center Aisle Caucus, and that is the idea of a Status of Forces Agreement and how such an agreement might be of benefit to us in Iraq.

And for purposes of this discussion, that Status of Forces Agreement is an agreement that is worked out between our government and the foreign country that delineates the legal partnership between the troops who are deployed to that country and the host government. And that is a very significant issue.

In the civil side of the law, for example, a Status of Forces Agreement can spell out proceedings under which nationals of the host country may file claims against the United States for damage to property of these nationals that has been inadvertently caused by the United States Armed Forces. An agreement is also important because it can be used to spell out jurisdictional issues with regard to criminal offenses. For example, these agreements are often used to make sure that American servicemembers who commit offenses overseas and are tried by U.S. military courts-martial rather than local courts. They can also delineate the conditions under which U.S. servicemembers charged with crimes within the boundaries of the host country are treated. A Status of Forces Agreement can specify, for example, that a servicemember accused of a crime in violation of local laws must be detained on board a ship or some other U.S. installation rather than await trial in a local jail.

We have never had a Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi government. I know that is something that you have been strongly advocating, and I believe it is high time that we implement one for a few reasons. First, a Status of Forces Agreement is an agreement between two sovereign nations. By executing such an agreement, we would be affirming sovereignty of the Maliki government and the right, as well as the obligation, of that government to exercise control over its own territory.

Second, a Status of Forces Agreement would send a clear message both to the Iraqis and to other countries in the region that we do not intend to establish permanent bases in Iraq. I think something that many of us on both sides of the aisle agree. And this agreement is usually negotiated for a fixed period of time, and it can be renewed or not, as was the case with the old Subic Bay naval base in the Republic of the Philippines.

The Philippines example is instructive, I think, in this instance. There

the Aquino government asserted its sovereign rights over Subic Bay by refusing to renew a prior agreement and other related treaties with our government in 1992. Thus the world was made to know that even though the U.S. had a presence in Subic Bay and a neighboring city for more than 90 years prior to that time, that presence was not permanent and was subject to an agreement that had to be agreed to by both nations. And third, as described a few moments ago, this agreement, if properly negotiated, can protect U.S. forces from being tried by foreign courts or prevent them from being detained in Iraqi facilities if charged with a crime under foreign law. This kind of measure is necessary to make sure that Americans operating overseas have the fullest protections afforded to them by Federal jurisprudence.

I also really want to thank you again for organizing this, and I think these shared principles you have outlined here are really a basis upon which we can have further dialogue. And a little later in this Special Order, I might want to talk about the Iraq Study Group recommendations, the Baker-Hamilton report, that I think many of us on both sides of the aisle have a good feeling about, and there is legislation that has been proposed and recently introduced, and I will get into that a little later.

At this time I would like to yield to one of our other colleagues, the distinguished gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS), who has been to Iraq 17 times now.

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, I thank all four of my colleagues, Mr. GILCHREST, Mr. DENT, Mr. BISHOP, and Mr. ISRAEL. I wanted to be here simply for the novelty of Republicans and Democrats trying to talk about where we could find common ground.

My basic view is that we made a mistake going in given that we didn't find weapons of mass destruction. But I tend to think it would be a mistake to leave precipitously. I think we went in on a bipartisan basis, and I think we could leave on a bipartisan basis. I just don't think we are as far apart in some ways as some may think.

I do think there should be a Status of Forces Agreement instead of a U.N. resolution as an occupying nation. If the Iraqis don't want us there, we will leave. I feel we attacked them; they didn't attack us. And we have an obligation before we leave to replace their army, their police, and their border patrol. That is really one of your shared principles. But if they want us to leave before, then they are a sovereign nation. They could ask us to leave and we would.

I will also close with this because I think it would be nice to have more of a dialogue rather than just speeches from us, but I think the Iraq Study Group is something that Democrats agreed to in principle and so did Republicans. And I agree that they left a little bit of discretion as to what they

meant and we could each view it in the way that we want to, and so that would have to be worked out. But the basic principles of the Iraq Study Group, to my mind, should be voted on and supported by both sides of the aisle, specifically getting the Americans and the coalition forces out of doing police work.

Secondly, getting the Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds to work out their differences. They said with consequence if they didn't. I think there should be a timeline. I just think it should be not by 2/08. And, thirdly, to get the nations around Iraq to dialogue and we should be dialoguing with them, including Iran and Syria.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman.

Before yielding to the distinguished gentleman from Maryland, just to clarify on the issue of Status of Forces Agreement, Mr. DENT was kind enough to join the Iraqi ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Sumaydi, and me and other members of the Center Aisle Caucus for a dinner where the ambassador himself talked about the importance of a Status of Forces Agreement.

Will it end the war tomorrow? Absolutely not. Will it end it next week? No. Is it one good, reasonable idea that will lower the temperature in Iraq, that will reduce the animosities that are flaming out of control there? I believe it will. And I am appreciative that the gentleman from Pennsylvania has cosponsored a bipartisan resolution that asks the President to submit a Status of Forces Agreement to the Iraqi government, not conclude one because it has got to be negotiated, but at least submit one to send a signal and a message that we don't want to own the place; that we are there and we will leave when the Iraqi government wishes us to.

With that, I want to thank the gentleman from Maryland for his bipartisan leadership and his great measure of thoughtfulness on issues with respect to Iraq, and I yield to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. GILCHREST).

Mr. SHAYS. And I might add a former Marine, and I guess always a Marine, who was wounded in battle in Vietnam and was left on the battlefield for 3 hours before he was brought to safety, and we will always be grateful for that service.

Mr. GILCHREST. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And I also want to thank all of you for coming down here this evening for a thoughtful dialogue on the issues of war and peace that confront this country and literally the rest of the world.

I would just like to speak to the issue of Iraq in the context of where we are in the world today. This is not our grandfathers' world. This is not our parents' world. This is a new configuration that can't be compared to World War II or even the Cold War. This is a world that is now filled with tiny splin-

tering, struggling countries and cultures. The Soviet Union is gone. Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, we see a great deal of struggling third world countries, cultures, people trying to find their place, their niche.

One of the countries, the United States, has a golden opportunity to integrate ourselves with the rest of the world to encourage peace and security. And if we notice around the world, the world is integrated right now. The world is integrated globally. It is integrated economically with trade. It is integrated politically. It is integrated when there are disasters. We saw what happened with the tsunami to countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand and India and Indonesia when the world responded. The integrity of the world's compassion for these people was extraordinary.

The world is also integrated with disease. Whether it is Ebola, malaria, bird flu, TB, you name it, the world is integrated.

And one of the ways I think to solve the problem, besides solving the problem of Iraq on the House floor the way we are doing it tonight with a discussion, is to integrate our integrity with the great land mass that is around this great globe. The integration of integrity.

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I want to make a quick quote by a former artist, media person, diplomat named Norman Cousins, who wrote a fabulous book called "Human Options." In the book is one extraordinary quote, "History is the vast early warning system." And if we look at how we dealt with the Soviet Union over decades of time, it was step by step by step with dialogue. What did we do with China over decades, even after China said that they would like to destroy the United States, even if it wiped off half the population of China? It was step by step by step of dialogue. What did we do with the Cuban Missile Crisis? It was dialogue. Unfortunately, we never had a dialogue with Ho Chi Minh. We lost probably a million people on both sides of that conflict.

What is the issue here with Iraq? It's a dialogue with the Iraqis, it's a dialogue with the Sunnis, the Shi'as, the Kurds. It's a dialogue with the Syrians, the Iranians. It's a dialogue with the Middle East. It's a dialogue with the international community to integrate ourselves to make a commitment to the politics, to the economics, to the security of all the peoples of the world.

So, there is hope. There is movement. And the way to solve one conflict is to understand the nature of the culture. Talk first, for as long as is necessary. And that dialogue got us out of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Nixon went to China. Kennedy did not bomb Castro in Cuba. That can work today.

I will close with this comment from a book I recently read by Anthony Zinni called "The Battle For Peace." And Anthony Zinni described the Cold War

where one man is in a room with a cobra alone for decades, and the man wakes up one morning and the cobra is gone, but the room then is filled with bees; a whole different set of circumstances. And you don't deal with the bees the way you dealt with the cobra.

I thank all you gentlemen for coming here tonight for this integrated dialogue so our integrity can mesh a little bit better and we will find a solution.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank the gentleman. Before recognizing Mr. BISHOP, I want to follow up on a very important point that the gentleman made about the lessons that history teaches us with respect to the importance of having a dialogue with our adversaries. I wish we understood those lessons here in the United States Congress. Because if you take a look at those lessons of history, the Cold War, The Space Raid, World War II, all of the great challenges that confronted Congresses in the past have been solved with bipartisan dialogue. Think about the Cold War. It was the bipartisanship, the bipartisan approach of a John F. Kennedy and a Richard Nixon and that helped end the Cold War. Think about World War II. It was the political leadership of FDR and Harry Truman and the military leadership of Dwight D. Eisenhower. There was always great bipartisanship with respect to enormous foreign policy challenges in our country. Democrats and Republicans found ways to talk to one another. I guess there was a saying that "politics stops at the water's edge." One of the concerns I have is that we have kind of lost that sense, that we have made foreign policy and made issues of war and peace partisan issues. And what we are trying to do here in the Center Aisle Caucus, with the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. BISHOP) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. DENT) is bring Democrats and Republicans back to the water's edge in the Center Aisle.

And with that, I will yield to Mr. BISHOP.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. I thank Mr. ISRAEL for yielding.

I want to pick up on a comment that my friend from Connecticut just made with respect to how we should deal with the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. You suggested that we bring those recommendations here and we discuss them and endorse them. And I think that the model is the 9/11 Commission. It was a bipartisan commission that issued a unanimous set of recommendations, which in the main we have acted upon here in this Chamber. The Iraq Study Group was a bipartisan group that issued a unanimous set of recommendations. And I believe that they are ones that we can galvanize around, and I believe that they make good sense. They perhaps don't give all of us everything that we would want on either side of the aisle, but they do represent a way to move for-

ward. And I believe that if we were to bring those recommendations here, I believe they would attract majority support in this Chamber, and perhaps that could then be used as a means to moving with the administration, who I think now has also endorsed the recommendations of the Study Group.

Initially they seemed to reject them, or at least dismiss them, but I think now, as time has passed and as the situation on the ground has continued to evolve, they now recognize that they do have merit, that they do have legitimacy. And they also speak to several, if not all, of the shared principles that we are discussing here this evening that come out of the Center Aisle Caucus. So I thank you for making that suggestion, and hopefully we can carry forward with that.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank the gentleman. I will yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. KENT. Thank you, Congressman ISRAEL.

I wanted to make a comment. You had mentioned our dinner engagement between the Center Aisle Caucus and Iraq's ambassador to the United States, and we had a wonderful dialogue. And I was struck by something that the Iraqi ambassador had said to us. Of course we, often, in the United States, talk about the tribalism that we see within Iraq, Sunni and Shia and Kurd. And it is sort of hard for us to understand the complexities of those tribal relationships and interactions. And the Iraqi ambassador, obviously a very well educated man, made a comment back to us about what he more or less termed "American tribalism." I think referring to Republicans and Democrats. It's hard for them to understand how we operate. It was a point that I think was well intended and well understood. And I think that we have to think about that from time to time, that they see us, they see our bickering, too, from where they sit. We had a lot of comments about their behavior. Well, they have observed ours as well. And certainly our political dynamics are very difficult for them to comprehend. And I appreciated his insights.

I did want to make a few other comments about this recommendation, these 79 recommendations of the Iraq Study Group. I think many of us on both sides of the aisle realize that the beauty of this report maybe is not necessarily in every one of the 79 recommendations, but the process they adopted to make those recommendations. And I do want to give a little bit of credit tonight to the two prime sponsors of the legislation that was introduced just yesterday, that was Congressman MARK UDALL, a Democrat of Colorado, and on the Republican side, the father of the Iraq Study Group report, legislatively, FRANK WOLF, a Republican of Virginia.

And I think they have really gone out of their way to secure probably close to 50 cosponsors by now, fairly

evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. And again, I just think there is so much in this report that we can rally around and need to. I think we all agree, when you look at those shared principles up there, from defeating al Qaeda, I think every American, regardless of how they label themselves politically, agree that the defeat of al Qaeda is a primary and principal interest of all of us, whether in Iraq, or anywhere throughout the world. Containing Iran. Another issue we all agree, that the regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a menace, a threat, and we all I think agree that his potential acquisition of nuclear capability would be a very destabilizing influence on the world and something that none of us can tolerate.

And regional change; standing up for Iraqi Security Forces; secure Iraq's borders; take care of our veterans; and support our Armed Forces, I think those are great principles. I think this report, in many respects, addresses these issues.

So with that, I just again wanted to share those thoughts with you about the dinner with the Iraqi ambassador.

At this time I would like to yield back to Mr. ISRAEL.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank the gentleman.

I would pose a question, if I may, to the gentleman from Connecticut, who as Congressman DENT said has been to Iraq 17 times and chaired the Subcommittee on Terror. I know he was consulted with respect to the Iraq Study Group report or at least I believe was consulted with respect to the Iraq Study Group report and see if he would share his perspectives on the value of the Iraq Study Group report in terms of generating some bipartisan cooperation and moving us in the right direction in Iraq.

I would yield to the gentleman.

Mr. SHAYS. I thank you for your question.

What was stunning about the 9/11 Commission was it was Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives all trying to find common ground for addressing what was really a frightening sea change in our society, and that was the recognition that there was a real threat. And they called it "Islamist terrorism," which the Islamist community needs to deal with as well. I mean, it is not Islamists, it is these radical Islamist terrorists. But the Iraqi Study Group had that same approach, Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives making an assessment of the problem, and then recommending what needed to happen.

I would like to suggest something. And I would be interested, Mr. ISRAEL, how you would react to this, and that is, Mr. Petraeus and our ambassador are going to make a report in September. And I was thinking, you know, there could be a view they have a vested interest.

So one of the things that I would like to promote is that this same Iraqi Study Group go back to Iraq and say,

okay, this is what we found then, this is what we recommended. This is what General Petraeus is recommending and our ambassador. We either verify it or don't, or have subtle changes to it or maybe significant changes. But in other words, bring this third party back in to make an analysis since they already have credibility, and clearly General Petraeus does and our ambassador does as well. But I would be curious to know if any of you think there is merit to that idea.

Mr. ISRAEL. Well, I thank the gentleman. I think it is a very sound idea. The Iraq Study Group proved its value as an independent entity. And I have the highest regard for General Petraeus. In fact, he was in my office the day that the President announced the surge. And I was skeptical about the surge, personally I did not support the surge, but I thought it was important to reach out to General Petraeus and at least give him an opportunity to explain it to me.

I think he is the best we have. I have a very high regard for him. I think his report is going to be indispensable. I think it would be extremely useful to send the Iraqi Study Group back to take a look so that, like President Reagan said, "trust but verify." I think that verification would be extremely useful.

And I will yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. I would certainly agree. And I think we all await General Petraeus' report. And I don't know General Petraeus, but I have been told that he is a man of absolutely rigorous and unimpeachable intellectual honesty and he will give us an honest, spin-free report, which I think is something that we all need and would value. But I also think sending that coalition of people, as you say, Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, back to see on the ground conditions 9, 10 months after they wrote their report or 11 months after they wrote their report, I think would be enormously valuable and again perhaps would spur both the Congress and the administration to take their recommendations more seriously or give greater weight to them than we have thus far.

Mr. ISRAEL. Before yielding to the gentleman from Maryland, I want to again remind my colleagues and those viewing that what you've heard here on the floor of the House is different. You've actually heard Members from both sides generating ideas and agreeing to them rather than impugning each other's integrity. And that is exactly the purpose of this Special Order.

I yield to the gentleman from Maryland.

Mr. GILCHREST. I think when you generate ideas like we're having tonight with this decision, people are free to have an enthusiastic conversation where we can see each other's individual ingenuity. And then it is that collective ingenuity, that individual

collective ingenuity that spawns these kinds of ideas that solve problems.

I couldn't agree more that the Iraq Study Group reassemble to evaluate where they were just 6 months ago in their recommendations to where we might want to be in September or sometime this fall is an excellent idea. And I am pretty sure that those men and women would come together to do this second reevaluation.

The other thing is, I think we, as members of our group here, Members of Congress, we need to do some preparation ourselves prior to whatever that announcement, whatever that assessment is going to be in September, we have to have some preparation for what we think the status of the conflict in Iraq needs to be.

And the third thing, while we are preparing for this report by General Petraeus, while we are encouraging the Iraq Study Group to reevaluate the status, as General Petraeus will, I really think it's important for us to continue to pursue a dialogue with all of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria.

Now, we all know that the Ahmadinejad administration, if I can say that, has said some pretty pointed, scary, threatened things. But it is my understanding that the Iranian people do not see the world, do not see the United States through Ahmadinejad's eyes. The Syrian people, the parents, the fathers, the people who want good lives for their children, the Chamber of Commerce in Damascus wants to have a relationship with the United States. There are many, many business people, many, many people in Iran that want a relationship with the United States.

So as we are preparing for this discussion in September, where we are with the surge and where we are with the conflict, let's get the Iraq Study Group together. Let's prepare for that statement so we understand where we think we should be. And then let's continue to pursue, however difficult it is, this dialogue.

Mr. ISRAEL. The gentleman from Pennsylvania.

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Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I also want to endorse the gentleman from Connecticut's idea about reconstituting the Iraq Study Group and sending them back over to Iraq at some point to help give us an update of this very useful report. I think we all can agree that many of us in this country, and I suspect in Iraq too, are frustrated by this slow pace of reconciliation that is ongoing in Iraq.

But, again, another point about this report, and I think this gathering tonight, I think this helps us as Americans try to reconcile our differences. We talk about Iraqi reconciliation, but I think in many respects we need a little reconciliation of our own.

Mr. SHAYS. If the gentleman will yield, when I was there this last time, what I found for the first time was that

when the Iraqis got together to form a government last year, they were like someone described a sixth grade dance. The guys were there, the girls were there. Maybe once or twice there would be a little interaction, and they would go back. But nobody was dancing.

Now you are starting to see Sunnis, Shias and Kurds trying to see some common ground, and they are coming back to us and saying, don't rush us. But one of them said to me, I thought it was interesting, he said, "You are complaining about the fact that we may take a break in the summer. What about your monthly break?" They said, "You are asking Sunnis, Shias and Kurds to work together. How come you guys aren't working together?" They are starting to come back and throw that at us.

The difference is they are in an environment where they can get killed any day of the week, and yet we are telling them, find common ground. If they found common ground, probably some of that killing would talk.

But I am sorry to take so much of the time. I am just trying to add to your point that they are saying why don't we practice what we preach?

Mr. DENT. Well, it is a very fair point in many respects. I just want to point out something. When I first read this report back in December when it was first released, I had some concerns too, like many people, about some of the recommendations, particularly the recommendation about directly engaging Iran, for all the reasons we have identified. Ahmadinejad is a virulent anti-Semite. He has made such inflammatory comments. I think we all agree he is a menace.

After listening to Jim Baker and Lee Hamilton talk about the issue, I don't think any of us expect there to be any real process in a dialogue with Iran at a sub-cabinet level, but I think we also realize that you need to have that kind of a conversation initially and let the Iranians be an obstruction themselves, so we can then isolate them internationally and also perhaps drive a wedge between the Iranian Government and the Syrian Government.

I think it makes absolutely no sense for the Syrians to be engaged in destructive behavior in Iraq, given the fact that they have more than 1 million refugees, primarily Sunni, who are in Syria. Of course, Syria is ruled by Allawites, who represent about 10 percent of that country. So it is clearly not in Syria's interest to have protracted instability in Iraq.

So, again, I just wanted to thank the gentleman from Connecticut for his thoughtful idea about getting the Iraq Study Group back over there, perhaps hearing what General Petraeus says and make some recommendations on what he has said, and maybe give us a bipartisan way for us to move forward.

I think Americans want a solution. They don't want an issue in Iraq, but they want a solution. I think that is one of the great things about this dialogue tonight.

I yield back to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I would ask the gentleman from Connecticut whether he is proposing any specific initiative to formally request that the Iraq Study Group reconvene and make an assessment in Iraq in the near future. If he is, I would be pleased to join with him on a bipartisan basis.

Mr. SHAYS. To guarantee it would actually come to the floor of the House, maybe we could put your name first and mine second. But I would love to work with you on that.

Mr. ISRAEL. I would welcome that partnership.

I am going to yield to my friend from New York, Mr. BISHOP.

Mr. BISHOP of New York. I just want to make two points. One, on the question of engaging Iran and others that we see as enemies or adversaries, you are quite right, Mr. DENT, that there is no guarantee of success if we do engage, but we can virtually guarantee no success if we don't engage. So it just seems to me that engagement is absolutely crucial.

I think I am quoting former Secretary of State Baker correctly when I quote him as saying that engaging in dialogue with our enemies is not appeasement. It is diplomacy and negotiation and dialogue, something I think we have had too little of. Hopefully we are moving in that direction now, and signs recently are that we are.

The second point I would make is that Iran has an awful lot at stake here. If, in fact, as a great many fear, Iraq becomes a haven for al Qaeda, I cannot imagine that Iran views an al Qaeda-Sunni dominated state on their borders as something that is in their best interests. So I think that they clearly do have in effect common interests with us in terms of bringing some order, some stability, to Iraq.

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman. If my colleagues have any final comments, I would be happy to recognize them, and then I am prepared to close.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. GILCHREST.

Mr. GILCHREST. I thank the gentleman.

Just very quickly on the comment from the gentleman from New York, Syria is basically a secular country. It is not an Islamic state. It is secular. They feared al Qaeda and the Taliban, and they don't want al Qaeda in Iraq creating chaos. Al Qaeda was basically the enemy of the Iraqis. It was the enemy of Iraq. It was a disruptive factor in the Middle East.

So careful analysis of each country, using the best diplomats in the world that the United States has, has the potential for unraveling this very difficult, chaotic situation. We know we need a military presence in the Middle East, we know we need a political presence in the Middle East, and we know we need an economic presence in the Middle East. With the emphasis on the

politics and the economics with the Middle Eastern countries, I think we can back our way out of this chaos.

Mr. SHAYS. I would just like to thank you again for getting us together. This has really been a pleasure. I just admire all of you here tonight, and thank you for including me.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman from Pennsylvania?

Mr. DENT. I too want to commend the gentleman from New York for organizing this event tonight, this special order. We need to see a little bit more of this type of activity in this Congress, and I hope the American people who are watching this exercise tonight maybe find this a little bit different or maybe a little bit more refreshing than what they are accustomed to during special orders. I just want to thank you for putting this together.

One final point. I think Mr. GILCHREST made the point about interaction with Syria on a commercial basis in this country. A constituent called just the other day who imports various food products from Syria, because I have a large Middle Eastern community in my district. And just some of the challenges, they just want to go about life as they normally would.

I thought it was interesting. It kind of brings back home the point that people want to coexist peacefully. That the challenges and the stakes are very high in Iraq, and I think all of us want to make sure that whatever policy is pursued, particularly after September, it is one that is responsible and one that will make us all safer and hopefully the region more stable.

So, again, thank you, Mr. ISRAEL, for putting this on. It is much appreciated.

Mr. ISRAEL. I thank the gentleman.

I will close by thanking each of our colleagues to join with us this evening. Of the American people are accustomed to tuning into these so-called special orders and seeing a Democratic hour, which is usually spent beating up Republicans, and a Republican hour, which is usually spent beating up Democrats.

Tonight they saw something different. They saw Mr. DENT talk about a status of forces agreement, which Democrats can agree with. They saw Mr. BISHOP talk about the one-for-one agreement, which has bipartisan support. They saw Mr. SHAYS discuss an idea to have the Iraq Study Group reassess conditions, which has Democratic support. And they heard the historic perspective of Mr. GILCHREST, a perspective that only a Marine that was wounded in Vietnam can properly give to the United States Congress.

The point is that I believe that without sounding overly enthusiastic, that in the past hour there was more bipartisan, reasoned, rational discussion of ideas to move us forward rather than left or right than has happened on the floor of this House over the past 4 years. That is precisely what the Center Aisle Caucus was created to generate.

Tonight we close by sharing our principles: That we support our Armed Forces. We will take care of our veterans. More assistance passed in today's appropriations bill to veterans than at any time in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration, passed unanimously by the Appropriations Committee today. We will secure Iraq's border. We want to stand up Iraq's security forces. We understand the need for regional change. We will push for that. We understand the threat of Iran. And we want to defeat al Qaeda.

Today's discussion was not about left or right, it was about moving forward. I know the gentleman talked about the servicemember that he represents who was lost in Iraq. Again, I would ask the American people to continue to support our Armed Forces.

I can think of no better evening and no better person to inspire this special order than Matthew Baylis, who we lost in Iraq last week, and I believe he would be very proud of what we are doing this evening. As I said before, I don't know whether he was a Democrat or a Republican. I have no idea whether his family are Republicans or Democrats. I do know that they would be proud that this evening, Democrats and Republicans joined together to talk about a way forward, without a single one of us calling another one a name.

IMMIGRATION ISSUES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from California (Mr. ROHRBACHER) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Mr. Speaker, I have defended President Bush throughout most of his administration: From the war in Iraq; to those tragic mistakes that were made at Abu Ghraib, realizing they were just mistakes, but not at the heart of the policy; from the tax cuts to the preparation of the prescription drug bill.

I feel that I have been a loyal soldier to this administration, to the President, and, yes, to the country, especially on the country's war on terror. I have been four-square behind the President's successful efforts in that war and some of these efforts that we have been talking about today that are straining the public morale.

I have been very supportive of the President's tax efforts, fundamental economic efforts in the tax area to keep our economy humming.

So after all of this support, last week it was personally offensive to me to hear that I and millions of people like me were being described by the President as not wanting to do what is right for America because we refused to support the Kennedy-Bush immigration bill currently being examined and going through the Senate.

The President also suggested that those of us who oppose the type of legalization of status and those of us who