

**WINNING THE WAR IN IRAQ ON THE BATTLEFRONT AND THE
HOMEFRONT**

**Senator Joe Lieberman
The Brookings Institution
April 26, 2004**

(As Delivered)

We meet at a most important, dangerous, and difficult time in Iraq. Americans, Iraqis, and other nationals are dying in increasing numbers there. The outcome of the current conflict will have an enormous effect on the security of the American people, the freedom of the Iraqi people, and the stability and peace of the Middle East and the world. The days and weeks immediately ahead are fateful and they are perilous.

Yet, here at home, it is mostly politics as usual. Today, I am pleading with members of both political parties, with the Administration and the Congress, in the name of the hundreds of Americans who have already fallen in Iraq, and the thousands who continue to serve us there, in the interest of our nation's security, and in pursuit of our nation's highest ideals, to stop the bickering, to overcome the mistrust, to appreciate how similar are our current goals in Iraq, and to work together to achieve them.

In short, I am calling for a bipartisan political truce on the homefront that will greatly help us achieve the victory we all desire on the battlefield.

From the beginning, I was a strong supporter of the war in Iraq against Saddam Hussein. He was a dictator, warmonger, terrorist, outlaw, murderer, torturer, thief, and thug. As long as he remained in power, Saddam was a clear and present danger to the United States, the Iraqi people, the Middle East and the world. By his evil, inhumane actions and his decade of defiance of UN resolutions, he proved that he could only be dealt with and defeated by force. He was a ticking time bomb that had to be stopped before the next explosion. That is why we went to war last year in Iraq - to end Hussein's regime of terror, and to build in its place a better, freer future for the Iraqi people.

Thanks to the brilliance and bravery of American and allied forces, we won that war. But the final test of war is the quality of the peace that follows. Today we are clearly engaged in a new war in Iraq. From the day of Saddam's fall, the Iraqi people's hopes for a better life and the Coalition force's lives have been attacked by an evil alliance of remnants of Saddam's regime who refuse to accept defeat and of fanatical foreign and Iraqi terrorists who are part of the same jihadist movement that mercilessly attacked us on September 11, 2001.

I repeat, the outcome of this new war in Iraq will have enormous consequences for the people of Iraq, America and the world. If our enemies prevail and America retreats, Iraqis will face chaos, or a dictatorship, or both. The Iraqi domino could fall backwards as easily as it could fall forwards, and topple hopes for democracy throughout the Middle East. The region would be profoundly destabilized, which would gravely endanger American security, and the fanatical Islamic terrorists will be emboldened to take more aggressive actions against people in America, Europe and the Islamic world. The safety of our children's future would be greatly endangered.

On the other hand, if the Coalition prevails over the terrorists in Iraq, and a stable, democratizing, modernizing Iraq emerges, we will have dealt a significant blow to the worldwide jihadist forces and thereby improved our security. We would have created a new hopeful model for a better future throughout the Islamic world, stabilized the Middle East, and advanced America's historic mission of bringing the blessings of liberty, which we believe are the endowment of our Creator, to the Iraqi people.

With the consequences of victory or defeat in the new war in Iraq so clear, it should come as no surprise that there is almost no one here at home calling for an American retreat or withdrawal. No matter whether they supported the war against Saddam, as I did, or opposed it... or whether they criticized some of the Bush Administration's policies before and after that war, as I did, or supported them... just about all of America's elected leadership understand why we must win what I have called the new war in Iraq.

There is a real but unfortunately too often overlooked or concealed bipartisan American consensus in favor of this new war. We agree on the goal, if not always on the way to get there. Unfortunately, you would not know that if you just listened to much of the rhetoric about Iraq in this great capital city whose prevailing tone ranges from partisan to poisonous, or if you just followed the media, which reflexively stress conflict, not consensus. But the reality behind the rhetoric is that a bipartisan consensus is there. The question is no longer why we got in, but how we and the Iraqis can win in Iraq. We must quickly acknowledge that consensus and then find ways to work together to advance it.

Listen to these two statements, one by President Bush, the other by Senator Kerry, and tell me if you know who said what:

First: "We have to succeed in Iraq. We simply can't allow it to become a failed state. That would mean a victory for extremism, new dangers in the Middle East and a breeding ground for anti-American terrorism. To succeed, we are going to need more forces."

Second: "America's commitment to freedom in Iraq is consistent with our ideals and required by our interests. Iraq will either be a peaceful, democratic country or it will again be a source of violence, a haven for terror and a threat to America and to the world."

The first is from Senator Kerry. The second is from President Bush. These statements, and many others by both men, and by many others in both parties, show there is now a broad and growing bipartisan agreement on our basic purpose in Iraq today.

Both parties and both Presidential candidates agree that America cannot cut and run from Iraq. It is important to our security and our values.

Both parties and both Presidential candidates agree that we should send more troops.

Both parties and both Presidential candidates agree that we must seek and welcome greater involvement in Iraq from the international community.

Of course, there remain many important tactical and policy questions on which debate continues within the consensus. These include:

Is our goal in Iraq stability or democracy, or both?

Should we negotiate a truce with our enemies in places like Fallujah for domestic Iraqi political reasons, or use our power to take full control of those troubled places?

Should we rehire some of the Baathist military and government leaders?

Should the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis occur on June 30, and what should be the authority of the new Iraqi government?

What is the role we desire for NATO and the UN? Will they consider accepting it?

Should the Administration send to Congress a supplemental appropriations request for the cost of the war in Iraq as soon as possible, or wait until later this year or next?

Should we be allowed by the Pentagon to see the flag-draped coffins of Americans who have fallen in service to our nation in Iraq?

The answers to each of these questions - many of which I hope you will ask me this morning - can conceal the fundamental bipartisan consensus over how critical and worthy our purpose in Iraq is today - if we allow them to.

In the normal course of contemporary American political conduct, these policy questions become further occasion to create partisan, public disagreement and division. Campaign pressures can provoke and intensify it - and the media often perpetuates and exploits it. Each side grows increasingly distant from, and suspicious of, the other. The political debates last week surrounding the cost of the war, and the limited powers that might be transferred to the Iraqis on June 30, simply highlight our challenge.

My point here is that the homefront affects the battlefield. Politics as usual at home can and will have unusually bad consequences in Iraq. It encourages our enemies to believe they are succeeding in their attempts to influence our policy. They clearly seek by their hostage taking, by their desecration of the bodies of our dead, and by their terrorism to break the will of the people of America. And although we all say repeatedly that we support the 135,000 Americans who are serving in Iraq today, the more our troops hear the partisan division at home, the more they will, at best, be confused, or at worse, be demoralized. The world is also watching our political debate on Iraq, and gauging the depth of our resolve and the strength of our leadership.

I am not suggesting that for these reasons robust debate be stifled or that healthy questioning be stopped. That's not the American way. What I am suggesting instead is that we find a way to continue the debate and questioning without doing damage to our shared national values and goals. We must separate the conduct of the new war in Iraq from the normal politics of Washington and the hyper-politics of a Presidential campaign year. Because what is happening in Iraq today is that important to the future security of the American people and the lives of the American military who are serving in Iraq.

In some nations during such times of war or crisis, a unity government would be formed. That is not American tradition or practice. But our history does contain many proud moments when American leaders have put politics aside to work together to protect the nation's security. One of the most famous examples was the bipartisan cooperation in the Cold War that began with the collaboration between Democratic President Truman and Republican Senator Vandenberg.

During the 1990's, the Clinton Administration worked with Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress to create the NATO Observers Group, a bipartisan body that met regularly with the President and high-ranking Administration officials to discuss the enlargement of the alliance. This Group was critical in forging a strong consensus in Congress that

resulted in an overwhelming Senate vote in favor of expanding NATO.

During the Iraq wars, last year and this year, the Bush Administration and the Pentagon have regularly briefed Congress, but we need more than that now to cut through the distrust and stop the political sniping.

One option I want to suggest this morning is for the President and the Republican and Democratic leaders of Congress to agree to create a Bipartisan Congressional Consultation and Cooperation Council on Iraq, which would meet weekly with members of the President's war cabinet, and frequently with the President himself, to discuss the latest developments and decisions in Iraq.

Ideally, members of this bipartisan Council would also travel together to capitals throughout the region and the world to give public expression to America's unity of purpose on the new war in Iraq, and to enter into dialogue with leaders in those countries. Ultimately, the bipartisan Council could help achieve consensus on policy decisions before they become open domestic political wounds with international consequences. The distrust that increasingly separates the parties and the branches of our government would be overcome.

I recall here the words of Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War during the Second World War, who said that sometimes the only way to make a person trustworthy is to trust him.

On the costs of the war, for example, many Democrats are convinced that the Administration refuses to ask for the appropriations needed to fund the war until later in the year for purely political reasons. On the other hand, the Republican Administration resents this suspicion, sees it as partisan, and argues that it will obviously not allow the military to run out of funds. The debate grows louder and the distrust grows deeper. My estimation is that if the Administration and the bipartisan Congressional leadership discussed and agreed on an early request for the money in a Council such as the one I am suggesting. And when they did, the vote would reveal exactly the strong bipartisan support that is there for the new war in Iraq.

Our troops on the battlefield deserve and require such support and solidarity from the homefront. Our enemies deserve to be shaken by it. Our allies need to be encouraged by it. And our founding ideals of freedom and opportunity will be so much better served by it at home and in Iraq.

Now, more than ever, politics must stop at the water's edge, because now, more than ever, our politics here at home have profound consequences for security within our borders as well as beyond our shores. That is the urgent challenge we

face today - as Democrats, as Republicans, as Americans. It is a challenge we must and will best meet together.

Thank you.