

## **Baucus Floor Statement Regarding Iraq March 13, 2003**

I rise today to pledge my support for our brave men and women who are on the front lines protecting America as we work to eliminate terrorism . . . To pledge my support for the United States and all that our country represents: democracy, freedom of speech and religion, independence of thought. . . And to pledge my support for our leaders and our free and open elections that allow democracy to thrive.

I also rise today to urge and insist that throughout the ongoing situation with Iraq, we remember our underlying goal: To protect our country from weapons of mass destruction and terrorist threats and stop those who provide assistance to terrorist operations. In order to fully accomplish these goals, we need the support and assistance of the broadest possible worldwide coalition of our allies.

It's not in our nation's interest to establish arbitrary deadlines to force us to act without the support of others. This is not the time to isolate our country by moving into a unilateral war against Iraq. A war that could result in massive casualties and long term devastation. A war that has the likely potential of increasing terrorist threats against our nation.

There is no question that the United States has the ability and the right to take necessary action to protect our country. But we should not burn bridges -- bridges that we will surely need down the road -- in our rush to war with Iraq.

There is no debate that the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein must come to an end. He has a long history of attacking and murdering his own people, employing chemical and biological weapons, and continually defying the limits set forth by the UN. There have been reported links between Iraq and terrorist activity, although no link has been established between Iraq and the events of September 11. The Iraqi people and the global community deserve to be free from a cruel dictator and the threat to safety that he represents. The credibility of the United Nations and of America is on the line.

But we must take the time to fully weigh the risks and costs associated with unilateral action against the results we will achieve. The threat Iraq poses is not imminent. At least not so imminent that we can't continue with another week, or another month, of negotiations to garner the support of members of the United Nations Security Council.

The clock is ticking, but the alarm has not yet rung. I encourage the Administration to continue inspections beyond their self-imposed March 17 deadline. In these final critical minutes, we have the opportunity to lay out hard and fast, mutually agreed upon benchmarks for Hussein to meet—or not meet—to determine his fate. Britain laid out definitive steps yesterday, such as allowing Iraqi scientists to be interviewed abroad, destroying banned weapons and providing documentary evidence of any such destruction in the past.

While support for their resolution has not been overwhelming, it is important to continue along this path. Indeed, it is critical. We must both provide assistance to Britain, our strongest ally, while employing every resource at our command to garner Security Council support.

As the world's superpower, it is not only our responsibility, but it is in our best interest to lead. It's our responsibility to walk with and secure the support of our allies. The decisions we make in the coming days will have global reverberations and I am hopeful we won't have to endure the impacts alone.

In the case that unilateral military action is decided upon, the ramifications, lengthy reconstruction process and costs involved must be addressed. There are numerous reports that a war with Iraq will be a relatively short operation. But what follows...in a month...in six months...in a year?

If the United States chooses to go into Iraq alone and forsakes the support of a majority of our allies, the hurdles and pitfalls will be numerous. And the likelihood of long term success and stability will be diminished. If we are successful in our mission to remove Saddam, a successor will need to be determined. The likelihood of Iraq becoming a democracy in our lifetime is unlikely. Even with the ousting of Saddam, we must be prepared and accepting of a moderate Arab government similar to others in the region.

The cost of rebuilding the country will be enormous, both in terms of money and manpower. From ensuring the Iraqi children can obtain clean water to establishing a forum for a free and open government to thrive. Are we willing to take those costs solely upon ourselves?

We must also be ready to focus our resources on the stability of the entire Middle East region and Muslim world. We need a comprehensive policy of economic engagement, one that includes expanded trade. We should consider a trade benefits program similar to what we currently do for Africa, the Caribbean, and the Andean countries. In order to achieve long-term stability and reduce the terrorist threat, we will need to engage the entire region. And we will need our allies to assist in this engagement.

It's time to face facts. Our country is facing a troubling economy, unemployment, low growth, large national debt. Interest rates can't go much lower. If we continue to disregard the concerns of other Security Council members and move forward with only a small band of countries that support immediate military action, the lion's share of the costs and military burden will fall on America's shoulders. Where will this money come from? How long must our troops be away from their families? Months? Years? Decades? We must be fully prepared for this scenario before we move forward.

Iraq must be dealt with, but in order for our country to reach a safer place, we need to go beyond Saddam Hussein. We must create a long-term strategy for facing not only the Iraqi threat, but threats across the globe. Are we prepared to address the nuclear threat that we are facing from North Korea and Iran? Our current disengagement with North Korea -- which will only grow if we're at full scale war against Iraq -- will lead to more overt acts to test our limits. Are we also prepared for the additional terrorist threats we may face following a unilateral invasion of Iraq? This is a situation that will require a great deal of resources and world support.

We are all in agreement that Saddam Hussein is a bad man and the threat he poses cannot be disregarded. While I unequivocally support removing Hussein from power, knowing that he is a peril to the region and the world, I urge that we move forward with a strong coalition of support. The clock is running down, but there is still time to gather our allies. Our long term interests -- on every front -- will be best achieved by standing together, united behind our common goal of eliminating terrorism and keeping our countries safe.