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## Learning the Lesson of Iraq: A New Strategy for Iran

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University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Thank you for having me here today. Thank you.

Five years ago, the Bush Administration went to war with Iraq, a war we all know now we did not need to fight. Today, we see the results of that fateful decision -- a civil war with no end in sight... a black hole in our budget... and nearly 4,000 brave men and women in our military who have paid the ultimate price.

A famous philosopher once observed that those who don't remember history are condemned to repeat it. Unfortunately, the war in Iraq isn't even history yet, but the Bush Administration is repeating the march to war with Iran -- and they're getting help from people who should know a lot better.

George Bush, Dick Cheney, and the neocon warmongers used 9/11 to start a war with Iraq and now they're trying to use Iraq to start a war with Iran. And we have to stop them. We owe our American heroes -- the men and women in our armed services who are fighting so bravely in Iraq and Afghanistan today -- no less. Many of our soldiers are the same age as some of you here today -- or even younger. We owe them and their families this solemn oath: we will make every national security decision as carefully and responsibly as is humanly possible.

This is a critical moment. As a nation, we stand today at a fork in the road with Iran. We have a real choice about the direction we'll take. One path will replay the last seven years. It leads toward a dark future of belligerence, aggression, and war.

We need a new direction -- one that will defuse the Iran threat, rather than aggravate it, one that will make America safer, not make the world more dangerous.

To understand exactly what the administration is trying to do with Iran, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bush Administration and look at how they took us to war with Iraq.

In the spring of 2002, the nation was struggling to recover from the devastating terrorist attacks of 9/11. At the same time, a group of Bush Administration neoconservatives, like Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz, were strategizing for ways to start a war with Iraq. And suddenly, instead of reacting to 9/11 by working to protect America from terrorists, they saw a political opportunity to promote their right-wing ideological agenda and demonize anyone who disagreed with them.

Here's what you have to know about these neocons -- they think might makes right, every time. They believe in domination, not debate. They think America should use our military power to impose our will wherever and whenever we want. They use a sledgehammer when we should use a scalpel.

And here's what you need to know about George Bush's foreign policy -- it's written by these neocons, lock, stock, and barrel.

So after 9/11, instead of focusing on the terrorist threat, George Bush started promoting a radical new neoconservative doctrine he called, quote, "preventive war" -- which would soon become part of his argument for war in Iraq.

Here's what they mean by preventive war -- if we see a possible threat, we go to war; we don't exhaust diplomatic, political, and economic options, we go straight to war. Under this Bush doctrine, military force is no longer the option of last resort.

By September of 2002, President Bush had included the new doctrine in his administration's National Security Strategy -- the document that guides our military in planning our defense. And then the next month, Congress voted to authorize the president to use force in Iraq. I was wrong to vote for this war. It was a mistake to give this president the authority to wage a reckless war in Iraq.

HOW YOU CAN TAKE ACTION










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**Town Hall Meeting with John Edwards**  
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Reno, Nevada

**Town Hall Meeting with John Edwards**  
Jan 16, 2008  
Las Vegas, Nevada

Now, I want to be very clear about something. I believe very strongly that any commander-in-chief must retain the right to respond with appropriate force when there's real intelligence about an imminent threat to America.

But there is a difference between doing everything in our power to keep America safe and a reckless, belligerent policy that actually makes us less safe. The preventive war doctrine was a stunning departure from the policy that had kept America safe during both world wars and during the Cold War. It is wrong on the merits, wrong on the morals, and wrong for America.

Harry Truman once said, "There is nothing more foolish than to think that war can be stopped by war. You don't 'prevent' anything other than peace."

That's exactly right. Think about it -- you don't prevent wars by starting them. It would be ridiculous if it weren't so dangerous.

This George Bush policy instead is, almost literally, "shoot first, ask questions later."

Armed with their preventive war doctrine, the administration used every excuse to march to war, when he should have taken every reasonable step to prevent war. And the war has backfired terribly. It damaged America's moral reputation, decreased our national security, and increased terrorism worldwide.

It will take years to repair the damage, and we must begin by ending the war in Iraq. It has now been exactly a year since the American people voted for a Democratic Congress that would end the war. Yet we still have the status quo.

When I am president, I will immediately withdraw 40-50,000 troops, launch a diplomatic offensive to invest all local, national, and regional parties in the comprehensive political solution that will end the violence, and will completely withdraw all combat troops within 9 to 10 months.

The bottom line is simple -- no combat troops; no combat missions; no combat, period. Not sometime to be determined, not by 2013. By the end of my first year as president, by the end of 2009.

I believe every candidate for president owes the American people a clear and specific plan for ending the Iraq War, and I have done my part. You deserve to know exactly where we stand. With less than 60 days to the caucus, Senator Clinton has still not given specific answers to specific questions. How many troops will she withdraw, and when will she withdraw them? All she's said is that she will meet with her generals within two months of taking office. That's not a plan. That's not even a real promise. It's the promise of a planning meeting.

What's more, Senator Clinton wants to keep combat troops in Iraq to perform combat missions in Iraq. She will extend the war. I will end the war. Only in Washington would anybody believe that you can end the war and continue combat. On a matter as serious as Iraq, we need honesty and real answers -- not more double-talk.

And all of this is occurring in a very dangerous context -- when we badly need leadership that will stand up to the president. The neocons are once again preparing for war. Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently told reporters that the administration has prepared "contingency plans" for attacks. George Bush has been rolling out reckless rhetoric, saying that "World War III" is just around the corner with Iran. And just over a week ago, Bush and Cheney declared the Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization and a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction.

We have seen this movie before. And it doesn't end well -- in fact, as we all know too well, in Iraq, it hasn't ended at all.

In order to declare the Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization -- something we've never done before for a government-run militia -- Bush was supported by the Senate. Many in our party opposed this vote, like Senator Dodd and Senator Biden, and I applaud them for that. Unfortunately, some supported it. Senator Clinton once again sided with Bush and the neocons -- helping them rattle their sabers and build their case for another preventive war.

It's clear that Senator Clinton and I learned very different lessons from the run up to the Iraq war. I learned that if you give this president an inch, he will take a mile -- and launch a war. But Senator Clinton apparently learned a different lesson, and she's giving the administration exactly what it wants once again.

Senator Clinton is voting like a hawk in Washington, while talking like a dove in Iowa and New Hampshire. One of her advisors told the New York Times that was because she was shifting from primary mode to general election mode. Well, we only need one mode from

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Jan 16, 2008  
National

#### Town Hall Meeting with John Edwards

Jan 17, 2008  
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#### Rally with John Edwards in Los Angeles

Jan 17, 2008  
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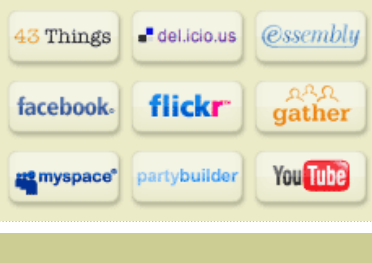
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our president -- tell the truth mode all the time.

So let me be clear.

We should take Iran very seriously. And as commander-in-chief, if I ever learn that any nation is threatening an imminent attack, I will do what's necessary to protect America.

But the one thing we absolutely should not be doing is launching another so-called "preventive war" with Iran. American and the world possess a powerful arsenal of diplomatic and economic options that have not yet been used, let alone exhausted.

We need to use all those tools to force President Ahmadinejad, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and the mullahs to understand that their nuclear ambitions and their support of terrorism will put the Iran on a fast track to utter isolation.

We already know diplomacy can work with even the toughest foes. The few foreign policy successes of the Bush Administration have come through the diplomacy it derides. Both North Korea and Libya have given up their struggle for weapons of mass destruction. While we need to keep the pressure on to make sure these countries keep their promises, the progress so far shows what can be accomplished in Iran.

We need to increase the division between extremists and the Iranian population. Ahmadinejad is already unpopular in his country and has failed to meet his promises to reduce corruption and improve the economy.

This is a country that's ready for change.

Women in Tehran today put on clothing they want to wear under the burkhas and veils they are forced to wear. Iranians everywhere share a hunger for ideas and free expression, seen in Iran's thriving black market in great literature, new classics, and even western videos. And it is Iranians like many of you in this room -- young people, students -- who are leading the charge to undermine the stifling oppression of Ahmadinejad.

We need to let the people of Iran know that Ahmadinejad's extremism and pursuit of nuclear weapons will only hurt them and destroy their country's prospects for advancement.

We need, in short, a new strategy for Iran. My plan for Iran has five principles.

First and foremost, we need to ensure that the preventive war doctrine goes where it belongs -- the trash-heap of history. As he has done with so much else, Vice President Al Gore got it right about the preventive war doctrine. In 2002 -- the same year that George Bush introduced his preventive war doctrine -- Gore made a speech at the Commonwealth Club in California. He said, and I quote, "What this doctrine does is to destroy the goal of a world in which states consider themselves subject to law, particularly in the matter of standards for the use of violence against each other. That concept would be displaced by the notion that there is no law but the discretion of the President of the United States."

These are especially chilling words to read five years later -- after Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, and the president's refusal to condemn torture, and they are particularly relevant to the situation with Iran.

I believe every candidate owes it to the American people to be very clear about where he or she stands on this question. As commander-in-chief, my national security policy will be based on deterrent strength and always protecting Americans -- in short, the use of force as a last resort.

As a part of this strategy, I will ask my National Security Advisor to remove President Bush's explicit endorsement of a preventive war doctrine from my National Security Strategies. And I will ask our Joint Chiefs of Staff to form military plans in accordance with proven national security strategies that we know can keep us and our allies safe -- not discredited and dangerous ideological fancies.

This strategy will keep America and our allies safe -- while showing the world we are once again a strong country that can always win war, but that prefers peace over war. Most importantly, it will restore our legitimacy in the eyes of the world. Everyone knows we're powerful. The question is what we use our power for -- and whether the rest of the world will once again see us as a force for good, rather than the bully we've become under Bush.

The second principle is to use bolder and more targeted economic sanctions to force Iran's leaders to understand that they cannot continue to buck the will of the international community without destroying their ability to be the modern, advanced nation they so desperately want to become.

There are smart sanctions that will achieve results, and there are reckless sanctions that will backfire and play into a policy of military attacks. The Bush-Cheney sanctions Senator Clinton supports are the most radical, unprecedented, and belligerent sanctions possible.

These reckless sanctions will escalate tensions between the U.S. and Iran -- the thing Bush and Cheney most want -- and have other unintended consequences, such as higher oil prices.

Instead, we should pursue smarter sanctions that will force Iran's leaders to realize that their pursuit of nuclear weapons will shut down their economy, further isolate them from the world community, and make them a rogue nation for generations.

We must fully enforce the Iran Sanctions Act, a law Congress passed to let the president punish companies who do business with Iran's extremist regime. We must work multilaterally -- most importantly, with our Western European allies -- to strengthen economic sanctions on Iran. And we should shut down Iranian access to the American financial system. The Bush Administration recently banned two Iranian banks from accessing our system. However, Iranians can still do business through third parties and through other banks. This must stop.

The third principle of my plan is to use "carrots" -- diplomatic measures to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions and re-join the world community. We should draw Iran into compliance through incentives including increased refinery capacity and a regional fuel bank that Iran could use for peaceful purposes.

And we need to use the possibility of bringing Iran into multilateral economic organizations, including the WTO, as a carrot for change.

The fourth principle of my policy is to reengage with Iran.

Even Republicans like Senator Hagel are now urging the president to open up communications with Iran. Communication is not a concession. After all, we talked to our great enemy, the Soviet Union, at the height of tensions during the Cold War.

We should begin building a new course of diplomatic relations with Iran by expanding low-level talks between government officials on both sides in a neutral country. The goal of these talks should be to find a path out of the log-jam created by the Bush Administration and, ultimately, to achieve full diplomatic relations between the two countries.

But we must always negotiate from a position of strength. Unlike President Bush, I believe we do need to meet with Iran. But any higher-level meeting should only happen if we verify that the meetings would promote America's national security interests and would not be used for propaganda or other improper purposes.

And the fifth and final principle is to reengage with other major nations on the challenge of Iran.

We must work with China and Russia on the problem of Iran's nuclear ambitions. Both nations have economic relationships with Iran on trade and energy. But both nations also have a strong interest in stability in the Middle East. And neither nation wants the nuclear club to expand. In the first year of my administration, I will convene a conference with my Secretary of State and representatives from the "E.U. 3" -- Great Britain, France, and Germany -- Russia, China and Iran, to discuss a way out of the stalemate of the Bush Administration.

The strategy I've described to you today is the right way to keep America strong while keeping the peace.

It is the right way to force Iran to forgo its nuclear ambitions.

And it is the right way to restore America's historic role as a leader of the world community -- through a combination of strength, vision, and reengagement with the world.

America needs a president who can guide America through a dangerous world, with the wisdom of history by our side.

America has gone through similar challenges before.

In his first inaugural speech, in 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt rejected the failed Republican policy of military intervention in Latin America and Europe. Instead, he told the nation, we should "dedicate this Nation to the policy of the Good Neighbor . . . the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors."

That's the America we should be.

This is the great vision of our great presidents. It is the vision of a nation of honor. It is the vision of a nation of everyday heroes, like the brave men and women fighting every day in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it is the vision that guides me as I seek to be your president.

But I need your help. We can only rebuild America if we rebuild it together.

Together, we can restore our values to Washington, and restore America's moral authority to the world. Thank you for being with me here today. God bless you and God bless America.