

News From _____

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BYRD SPEAKS OUT ON IRAN

BYRD: AMERICA MUST NOT "SLEEP WALK" INTO ANOTHER DISASTROUS MILITARY CONFRONTATION

Washington, D.C. . U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., delivered remarks today on growing tensions between the U.S. and Iran and the recent Senate resolution designating a portion of the Iranian Armed Forces as a terrorist organization. In a speech on the Senate floor, Byrd expressed his dismay that the U.S. Senate has joined the chest-pounding and saber-rattling of the Bush Administration.

Excerpts:

We are now more than four years into a war that was launched by false fears and scary hyperbole, and here we are again, being led down a path by chest-pounding rhetoric, without a clear idea of where that path is taking us.

Every day it seems the confrontational rhetoric between the United States and Iran escalates. We hear shadowy claims about Iran's destabilizing actions in Iraq, with little direct evidence offered to back it up. The President telegraphs his desire to designate a large segment of the Iranian army as a terrorist organization—and instead of counseling prudence, the United States Senate rushes ahead to do it for him. I hope that we can stop this war of words before it becomes a war of bombs.

Senator Byrd's Full Remarks are below

Mr. President, last week, the Senate voted on an amendment to the Defense Authorization bill that designated a portion of the Iranian Armed Forces as a terrorist organization. I joined 21 of my colleagues in voting against that amendment. It was a dangerous, unnecessary provocation that is escalating the confrontational rhetoric between the United States and Iran. In response to the

passage of that amendment, the Iranian Parliament on Saturday designated the U.S. Armed Forces and the Central Intelligence Agency as terrorist organizations. Will someone please explain to me what has been achieved by this exchange of international verbal spitballs?

It is deeply troubling to see the U.S. Senate joining the chest-pounding and saber-rattling of the Bush Administration. I am no apologist for the Iranian regime, any more than I was for Saddam Hussein, but I fear that we may become entangled in another bloody quagmire. We have been down this path before. We have seen all too clearly where it leads.

Four and a half years ago, Secretary of State Colin Powell made a speech before the United Nations Security Council claiming to have evidence that proved Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and was an imminent threat to U.S. and international security. Others in the Administration made the rounds of the Washington news programs to pound the drums of war, scaring the public with visions of mushroom clouds and mobile chemical weapons labs. The proponents of war compared Saddam Hussein to Adolf Hitler, warning ominously of the dangers of Chamberlain-like appeasement.

That is a seductive analogy, but it is a dangerously specious one. Every foreign adversary is not the devil incarnate. We know now that Saddam Hussein was militarily a paper tiger. The intelligence that suggested he was an imminent threat was flat wrong. Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein had not attacked our country. Saddam Hussein was a ruthless tyrant, but he was not an imminent threat to U.S. national security.

And now we hear the same scare tactics and simple analogies trotted out again, this time with Iran. Analogies can be dangerous things; they risk oversimplifying complicated situations, and can lead to erroneous conclusions. While there may be some superficial similarities between Hitler and Ahmadinejad, it does not mean that our only option is to start World War III.

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As the philosopher George Santayana once said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Are we condemned to repeat the colossal blunder that is the Iraq war? Or has the United States Senate learned the lessons of history?

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We have seen the results when the U.S. Senate gives this Administration the benefit of the doubt: a war that has now directly cost the American people six hundred billion dollars, more than 3,800 American deaths, and more than 27,000 American casualties. A war that has stretched our military to the breaking point. A war that the commander of our forces in Iraq just three weeks ago could not say had made America safer.

I daresay many—perhaps most—in this chamber wish we had never gone into Iraq. Are we willing to sleep-walk into yet another disastrous military confrontation with a Middle East tyrant?

We need to talk directly to the government of Iran, without preconditions or artificial restrictions, and indicate that regime change is not our goal. Unfortunately, the President seems unwilling to take that step; we have held only two talks at a relatively low level, and those have focused solely on Iraq. Direct talks with North Korea about the issue we were most concerned with—North Korea's nuclear program—resulted in the first progress toward a denuclearized Korean peninsula in years. And yet with Iran we continue to refuse to discuss the issues we are most concerned about, insisting that they must first renounce their nuclear program. That is not negotiation. That is dictating ultimatums.

I agree that no option should be taken off the table when considering how to deal with any threat posed by Iran. But, if the President concludes, after serious diplomacy has failed, that an attack is necessary, he must make the case to the U.S. Congress and the American people. Under Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, only the Congress—the elected representatives of the people—have the power to declare war. Not the President.

The President has stated his belief that previously enacted Congressional authorizations to use force give him all the authority he requires to start a new war. I respectfully disagree. It is incumbent upon us to reassert the powers granted to the people's branch in the Constitution. That is the best way to prevent another colossal blunder in the Middle East. It is the people of this country who pay the price of such presidential misadventures. We, as their Representatives in the Congress, must not fail in our number one duty: to protect their interests.

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