

Extension of Remarks
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of Virginia
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Time for an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of my colleagues legislation I am introducing to create an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group (APSG), modeled after the Iraq Study Group (ISG), to bring “fresh eyes” to the war effort in Afghanistan which is now in its tenth year.

Last August, I began pressing the administration to convene an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group.

While reticent at first, to their credit President Bush, Secretary of State Rice and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld came to support the ISG, ably led by bipartisan co-chairs, former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton.

It has been my hope that the Obama administration would come to view this bipartisan “fresh eyes” approach as something which is ultimately good for our men and women in uniform and good for the country as a whole.

Aside from the specific policy recommendations, the Iraq Study Group helped force a moment of truth in our national conversation about the war effort.

It was apparent last summer, and it is truer still today, that with roughly 100,000 U.S. troops presently in Afghanistan, no clear end in sight to our nation's longest running war at 10 years and counting, and public support for the war at an all-time low, a national conversation about Afghanistan is what is in fact urgently needed.

Before proposing this idea to the Obama administration I spoke with a number of knowledgeable individuals including former senior diplomats, public policy experts and retired and active military. Many believed our Afghanistan policy was adrift, and there was near unanimity that an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group was needed. Among those distinguished individuals who embraced the idea was former Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker.

Sadly, the war has remained distant for many Americans. It is rarely spoken of from the presidential bully pulpit. In fact a recent *Fox News* piece reported that, “The last time Obama specifically devoted a full public speech to Afghanistan was December 9, 2009, 16 months ago, when he announced at West Point that he was sending an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to that war-torn country.”

Further, the war is seldom covered in great depth in the news. And yet for the husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who have sent off a loved one in uniform, the war in Afghanistan is anything but distant. It is uncertainty and sacrifice, it is separation and worry, it is life and death.

Despite my several letters to the president and other senior administration officials calling for a “vigorous, thoughtful and principled debate and discussion among some of our nation’s greatest minds,” the idea for a study group has languished.

And so today I am introducing legislation to create an Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group, comprised of nationally known and respected individuals who love their country more than their political party, and who would, I believe, serve to provide much-needed clarity to a policy that appears adrift at best and highly politicized at worst.

In reading *Obama's Wars*, I was deeply troubled by Bob Woodward's reporting which indicated that discussions of the war strategy were infused with political calculations. Woodward also wrote of an administration that "wrestled with the most basic questions about the war...What is the mission? What are we trying to do? What will work?"

These are questions that demand answers.

I believe that Americans of all political viewpoints can embrace this "fresh eyes" approach—for it is always in our national interest to openly assess the challenges before us and to chart a clear course to success. I urge my colleagues to join me in support of this legislation.