

# **U.S. Foreign Policy and the War on Terror**

**A Report from the Middle East  
Four Years After 9/11**



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### **Introduction**

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On September 11, 2001, our country suffered the most catastrophic attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor, instantly transforming the world as we knew it. Just as we remember Pearl Harbor as the beginning of the great struggle against totalitarianism, September 11th will long be remembered as the beginning of an equally momentous struggle against violent extremism. Within days we had ended the bipartisan, decades-long approach of neglecting the threat of Islamic extremism and arrived at a new consensus to make combating terrorism our top national security priority.

Our initial response to September 11th was strong and swift. But it was by no means final. On this fourth anniversary of one of the darkest days in American history, it is not only appropriate, but it is also necessary for us to step back and evaluate what we have done right, what we can do better, and where we have gone wrong.

I recently returned from a 10-day fact-finding mission to the Middle East to evaluate our progress against violent Islamic extremism. As the ranking Democrat on the Terrorism Subcommittee in the House of Representatives, I met with our civilian and military leaders on the frontlines in that region and with senior officials in Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Morocco.

In the following pages, you will find my thoughts on our progress in the war on terror four years after 9/11. Underpinning this "white paper" is the principle that U.S. foreign policy should be driven by two basic goals: (1) advancing America's national interests and (2) promoting freedom and prosperity abroad. The two are inseparable because they link our national survival with our national character. In reassessing the war on terror, one conclusion seems obvious: that the United States has failed to use all of the tools available to us -- diplomatic, educational, political, and economic -- and that we must do better. On the last page, I have included some related topics I hope to explore in the future.

*-- Marty Meehan  
Member of Congress*

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## Trip Report

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The purpose of my 10-day fact-finding mission to the Middle East this month was to evaluate our progress against violent Islamic fundamentalism. As the ranking Democrat on the Terrorism Subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives, I met with our civilian and military leaders on the frontlines in that region and with foreign leaders in Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Morocco.

My overall impression was that the United States government has dedicated more resources and energy to addressing violent extremism post-September 11th than ever before. But I also found an extremely negative perception of the United States in the region, largely fueled by the war in Iraq and the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. There was also a sense that we have not yet developed an approach to achieving our strategic objective of stopping the spread of Islamic extremism.

In Egypt, I evaluated the status of U.S.-Egyptian cooperation in the Middle East and examined Egypt's first multi-candidate presidential election in the last days of the short-lived campaign. My schedule included meetings with U.S. Ambassador Francis Ricciardone, President Hosni Mubarak, Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, and Defense Minister Mohammed Hussein Tantawi.

Egypt is a prime example of the many dilemmas we face in working with authoritarian Arab governments. Egypt has supported our efforts on a number of fronts including disrupting terrorist networks. The Egyptians are also helping to patrol the Gaza border, they operate a medical facility in Afghanistan, and they have offered to help train Iraqi security forces. At the same time, the Egyptian government continues to thwart democratic opposition giving rise to growing public discontent. In the days following my visit, President Mubarak was re-elected with 88% of the vote, a clear indication that the election process lacked transparency and fair competition. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice observed that President Mubarak "unlocked the door" by allowing some opposition groups to participate in this election. Unfortunately, as the outcome of the election made clear, that door remained decidedly closed.

In Israel, I sought out information about the dangers and opportunities for the Roadmap to Peace surrounding the withdrawal of Israeli settlers from Gaza. I met with Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, and with Bethlehem's Palestinian Governor Zuhair Manasrah. With the completion of Israel's unprecedented, unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, the world is watching how effectively a fledgling Palestinian democracy can convince terrorists to disarm and participate in the political process. This is a major historical crossroads in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Though this report is not about the Arab-Israeli conflict, that conflict has a major impact on our relationships in the region and on the war on terror. The Bush Administration was mistaken to remove the United States from the peace process for its first two years in office. At this new turning point, it is essential for the United States to remain engaged at the highest levels. Both the Israelis and Palestinians are entering election cycles that are likely to change the dynamics of the peace process. At this critical and historic time, we must do all we can to ensure that the peace process does not fall victim to domestic politics on all sides of the conflict. Once new governing coalitions are established on both sides, the United States should seize that opportunity and initiate a new round of negotiations for the Road Map to Middle East Peace in the post-disengagement era.

In Lebanon, a country with long experience in dealing with terrorism, I gained insight into the departure of Syrian military forces, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and the future of relations between Christian and Muslim sects. I traveled to Lebanon on the day that four pro-Syrian Lebanese generals were taken into custody after being accused by a Lebanese judge of carrying out Prime Minister Hariri's assassination. The arrests, and ongoing UN investigation, have clear implications for Lebanon's fledgling system of self-government, a topic I discussed during meetings with U.S. Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, and President Emile Lahoud.

In Morocco, I met with U.S. Ambassador Thomas Riley, Moroccan Foreign Minister Mohammed Benaissa, and Moroccan Prime Minister Driss Jettouour. Some Moroccan expatriates have been implicated in international terrorism and Morocco has suffered its own domestic terrorist attacks. My consultations largely focused on Morocco's counterterrorism efforts in North and West Africa. Morocco maintains an active port security program in Casablanca to interdict terrorist smuggling. Morocco is also one of 9 African nations participating in a five-year, \$500 million Pentagon initiative to help Western African countries of the Sahel region combat terror.

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### **How to Wage a War on Terror**

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During my consultations in the Middle East, the message I received was uniform and clear: that we are at a critical moment in the war on terror and that for the United States to be effective in confronting the threat of radical Islam we need to be doing much more than we are now. We need to translate our resolve to combat terrorism into effective action. To do so we will have to utilize every element of our national power -- political, economic, educational, diplomatic, and military.

The concern I heard repeated by foreign leaders and U.S. officials alike is that, in spite of our successes in Afghanistan and elsewhere, fundamentalist extremism has continued to spread around the globe. New terrorist cells are popping up in Europe, Africa, and Asia and existing cells are recruiting new members and growing in capability. In fact, there have been more terrorist attacks worldwide in the four years since September 11th than in the four years prior.

Even in the upper echelons of the Bush Administration there appears to be a consensus that the failure to fully utilize all the elements of our national power has prevented us from stopping the spread of Islamist terrorism. We have been effective in the military elements, but have underutilized too many other powerful tools. As Thomas Kean, Republican Chairman of the 9/11 Commission put it, "if we favor any tools and neglect others, we leave ourselves vulnerable."

In October of 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put a sharp point on the problem in a now famous memo asking senior commanders whether we are "capturing, killing, or deterring and dissuading" more terrorists every day than the terrorists are "recruiting, training, and deploying against us." He noted that the United States did not have a "broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists" and that the United States was putting "relatively little effort into a long-range plan."

Since then, Secretary Rumsfeld has expounded on his criticism of the war on terror. This past May he gave a speech observing that rather than use the term "war on terror," we should instead refer to a "global struggle against violent extremism." President Bush echoed that sentiment in August when he said "we actually misnamed the war on terror. It ought to be called the struggle against ideological extremists who do not believe in free societies and who happen to use terror as a weapon."

Regardless of what name we use to talk about this challenge, we must think beyond just the military approaches to the long-term challenges of violent extremism. As General Richard Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has explained: "If you call it a war, then you think of people in uniform as being the solution... We should be using all instruments of our national power because the solution is more diplomatic, more economic, more political, than it is military."

Because we are not just dealing with a fixed number of terrorists, but with a pool of potential terrorists as well, our struggle against radical extremism must be two-pronged. The first prong is confronting extremists -- capturing and killing terrorists, disrupting their networks, and denying them sanctuary. The second is confronting extremism -- preventing the spread of violent fundamentalism to new individuals, groups, countries, and generations.

The Bush Administration has addressed this second element in its rhetoric. But words are not actions and actions are what matter. Nearly two years after Secretary Rumsfeld's initial criticisms, the Administration has still failed to put a comprehensive national plan into action that is effective at preventing the creation of new terrorist enemies.

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### **Iraq and the War on Terror**

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Last January, after returning from a trip to the Middle East to visit our brave men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, I issued a white paper, *Iraq: The Light at the End of the Tunnel*, assessing the state of affairs in Iraq and placing it in the context of America's global strategic objectives. Specifically, my paper recommended an exit strategy addressing our achievable goals in Iraq and proposed the announcement of a timetable to drawdown the majority of U.S. forces during 2006. The paper singled out the training of Iraqi security forces as our top priority in Iraq and suggested that the long-term American role will not be in providing military occupation, but in leading the international reconstruction effort. The paper concluded with a short section on what the Pentagon calls the Global War on Terror. It argued that the current U.S. policy in Iraq is hurting the war on terrorism by consuming resources that could be better used elsewhere, eroding military readiness, straining long-standing alliances, and inflaming the Muslim world.

I also worked with a bipartisan group of legislators to introduce the Homeward Bound Act (H.J. Res 55), which calls on the President to accelerate the training and equipping of Iraqi Security Forces; support Iraq's completion of the political transition to a democratic government as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1546; announce a plan by the end of 2005 for the eventual withdrawal of all US military forces from Iraq; and begin the return of US troops from Iraq no later than October 1, 2006.

At Fort Bragg on June 28 of this year, the President told the American people that "we fight today because terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens, and Iraq is where they are making their stand." In reality, recent analysis has determined that 95 percent of the insurgents in Iraq are native Iraqis, not foreign fighters. But more troubling, new reports indicate that the majority of those insurgents in Iraq who are foreign fighters had not previously been involved in any form of terrorism. Rather, they had become radicalized by the war in Iraq itself.

President Bush's claim that we are "fighting the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them at home" also does not ring true. As one terrorism expert, Peter Bergen of the nonpartisan New America Foundation, recently explained, "the President is right that Iraq is a main front in the war on terrorism, but this is a front we created... To say we

must fight them in Baghdad so we don't have to fight them in Boston implies there is a finite number of people." The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Porter Goss, stated clearly to the Senate Intelligence Committee: "Islamic extremists are exploiting the Iraqi conflict to recruit new anti-U.S. jihadists."

These findings are a major concern. The Bush Administration's own National Intelligence Council recently released a study on terrorism which found that there is a new class of terrorists arriving from other countries and being "professionalized" in Iraq by acquiring "training grounds, technical skills, and language proficiency." For these people, "political violence becomes an end in itself." These newly recruited, newly radicalized terrorists will inevitably return to their home countries with more expertise and violent motivation than before. The task of confronting these killers will extend beyond the Middle East to places like Central Asia and the Sahel in Western Africa and will be a major challenge for years to come.

My most recent trip to the Middle East strengthened my view that Iraq remains a central component to our relations in the Muslim world. It was the primary topic of conversation with foreign officials and, in their minds, the most immediate cause for negative public perception of the United States.

Iraq is, at best, a distraction and, at worst, counterproductive to our struggle against violent extremism. The United States must continue to accelerate the training of an Iraqi government and security force capable of maintaining the rule of law independently, publicly declare our intention to have no permanent military presence in Iraq, and announce a timetable for a drawdown of a substantial number of our forces.

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### **Confronting Extremists: Progress and Prospects**

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Since 9/11, our efforts to disrupt, disperse, and deny sanctuary to al Qaeda have resulted in significant decentralization of operatives and cells. Our actions appear to have reduced their ability to conduct major operations like the September 11th attacks in the past few years. But this decentralization also makes the task of collecting and analyzing intelligence and conducting offensive operations more difficult. As we have seen in Indonesia, Spain, Egypt, and the United Kingdom, self-organized terrorist affiliates continue to plot and strike. And though those attacks were on a smaller scale than those of September 11th, they were nonetheless brazen and sophisticated.

In April 2005, the U.S. Department of State concluded in its annual terrorism report that we are in a "new phase of the global war on terrorism" because unaffiliated local groups of Islamic radicals have replaced al Qaeda as the most worrisome threat. The report lists thirty-nine organizations other than al Qaeda that have been responsible

for financing terrorism or conducting acts of terror against Americans during the past five years. Forty more organizations are listed as being of serious concern. As the 9/11 Commission pointed out, the conditions for terrorism are present in areas from the Pakistan-Afghanistan border to the Arabian Peninsula to the Horn of Africa to Southeast Asia to the expatriate communities of Western Europe.

As the war on terror spreads to new countries, we need to work closely with our allies to ensure that we can tap resources and intelligence around the globe to disrupt terrorist networks and to limit their reach. We still have a national, bipartisan consensus to capture and kill those terrorists who are beyond appeal to abandon their holy war against the United States and our allies. We must continue our offensive against those who are determined to cause us harm, including continuing the hunt for Osama bin Laden and other leaders responsible for planning the September 11th attacks.

But, in addition to confronting existing extremists, we must redouble our efforts to prevent the spread of extremism and thereby prevent the creation of more terrorists. Our military deserves our deepest gratitude for their brave work fighting terrorism around the globe. But we must do more than strike at the branches of the extremist tree. We need to strike at its roots.

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### **Confronting Extremism: A Comprehensive Approach**

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We speak often of the "roots" of terror, but few people have a sense of what that really means. To be clear: Islamist extremism as we know it today is the end result of decades of corrupt rule, humiliation at the hands of autocratic regimes, political disenfranchisement, and a disconnect from modernity. Islamic extremism is not simply the perversion of religion. It is a product of governments that have failed their people. Among these government are many of our autocratic "friends" in the region. Regardless of its roots, our security requires us to deal with the issues that give rise to the anger and frustration terrorists exploit.

Douglas Feith, Secretary Rumsfeld's point person for the war on terror for four years, recently explained in an interview why confronting extremism must rank as high of a priority as confronting extremists: "If we limit our efforts to protecting the homeland and attacking and disrupting terrorist networks... we will find ourselves on a treadmill that is likely to get faster and faster... The key to ultimately winning is to address the ideological part of the war that deals with how the terrorists recruit and indoctrinate new terrorists." In other words, our national security depends on our ability to demonstrate to the Muslim world that their future does not rest with the extremists.

Confronting violent extremism by mitigating the intense and widespread Islamic anger against the United States must become an organizing principle for our foreign policy, much as containing communism was an organizing principle during the Cold War. This will require a wholesale re-conception of our efforts at public diplomacy as well as a long-term American commitment to promoting education reform, economic development, and freedom in the Muslim world.

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**First Recommendation:  
Public Diplomacy**

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We are in a contest of ideas. On our side, we have the universal human desire for freedom and opportunity. But our enemies seek to exploit ideas that have unfortunately gained momentum: suspicion of the West, fear of modernity, hatred of the United States, and persistent anti-Semitism. Over the long term, the values of freedom and tolerance will win this struggle. But we must wage it more effectively. We must make clear what the terrorists are seeking to do -- and offer the better alternative of freedom and prosperity.

There has been a basic failure within the U.S. government to communicate effectively with the Muslim world. For example, while Egypt is the second largest recipient of U.S. assistance outside of Iraq, only 15% of Egyptians have a favorable impression of Americans. Similarly, following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, 93% of Moroccans expressed disappointment that Iraqis did not offer more resistance. Anti-Americanism is on the rise and it represents a direct threat to our national safety. We need to refocus our efforts to develop a national public diplomacy strategy that increases engagement, exchanges, education, and empowerment in the Muslim world.

Improving public diplomacy means more than merely attempting to "re-brand" the United States. Public diplomacy cannot be crisis management or "spin." Rather, it must be a sustained, large scale, cross-cultural conversation and a coherent effort by the United States government to engage in meaningful dialogue in public forums and media.

Specifically, we need to increase funding for people-to-people exchanges, form partnerships with private media companies to develop American programming for Arab cable channels, sponsor American cultural centers in Arab cities, and increase the number of Arabic speakers in the U.S. government. American officials at all levels of government should take part in an ongoing dialogue campaign. A small example would be a doctor from the National Institutes of Health traveling to Cairo to give a guest lecture at an Egyptian university, or for U.S. embassies to open cultural centers in Arab cities. We also need to reinvigorate the U.S. Information Agency, U.S.-sponsored Arabic radio and television, and the public diplomacy offices in the State Department.

Additionally, we must see a commitment at the White House level to integrate public diplomacy efforts into the policy development process.

Reports and reform recommendations for U.S. public diplomacy have been issued in the past three years by the 9/11 Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Defense Science Board, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the congressionally-mandated Advisory Group to the Department of State on Public Diplomacy. To date, virtually none of their major recommendations have been implemented. In fact, until this month, the senior U.S. government post for public diplomacy, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, had been vacant for well over a year. In April, a Government Accountability Office report concluded that the United States government "does not yet have a public diplomacy communications strategy."

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**Second Recommendation:  
Education Reform**

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A major push for serious education reform abroad is particularly important. Because of the numerous political, diplomatic, and cultural concerns that arise when discussing U.S. involvement in education reform in the Arab world, it must be handled with care and sensitivity. But it is essential to expand educational opportunity in the Muslim world to create a new generation prepared to adequately provide for themselves and their societies. It is particularly important to include women, who have largely been left behind in Muslim education and whose empowerment must be a top priority.

We have heard much in the United States about the need to close down "madrassas" that are teaching extremism and hate. While we cannot and should not condemn all Muslim educational institutions, we must recognize that there are indeed some private religious schools in the Muslim world that do inculcate hatred and are distorting long-valued traditions of religious education in their communities. To meet this threat, we must do what we can to promote reform of problematic madrassas in places like Pakistan and help Muslims reclaim their educational institutions from extremists and those that support them.

As an overarching policy, however, we must focus our resources on increasing the availability of effective public education. Throughout the Muslim world, the greatest educational problem is not the presence of schools that produce radical extremists, but the absence of schools altogether or schools that produce students who are neither skilled nor prepared for the modern workplace.

Education reform is a major priority both for the political and economic future of the Muslim world. In some cases, economic growth in the Middle East has been limited

largely by shortages in skilled human capital. Education and literacy lead to economic opportunity and, in turn, to freedom and prosperity. As the 9/11 Commission recommended, the President should use his authority to create an International Youth Opportunity Fund.

The Bush Administration has made several hundred million dollars worth of commitments to global education reform over the past few years, but it has been limited in scope. We need to spearhead a major international initiative, perhaps as part of the G8's Broader Middle East Initiative, on the level of \$5-10 billion to provide the resources to develop new schools and textbooks, with an emphasis on math and science.

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**Third Recommendation:  
Economic Development**

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On the economic front, we need to develop a "Middle Eastern Marshall Plan" for economic reform. Overregulation, bureaucratic ineptness, misallocation of financial resources, inadequate human resources, and, in some places, abject poverty contribute to a culture that breeds terrorism in the Middle East and many parts of Asia. Just as World War II was not won until the Marshall Plan secured Europe's democratic future, our government cannot succeed in the battle against global extremism until we commit to strengthening and rebuilding the economy and civil society in countries that are most susceptible to terrorist recruitment on their soil.

We should establish a central development bank and grant-distributing agency similar to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development or the Inter-American Development Bank. Like the Balkan Trust for Democracy, this international institution would act as a resource for donor governments as well as non-governmental organizations, charitable foundations, and think tanks. It would also help channel assistance around the systems of patronage that governments have created to distribute foreign aid.

As the 9/11 Commission explained, "A comprehensive U.S. strategy to counter terrorism should include economic policies that encourage development, more open societies, and opportunities for people to improve the lives of their families and to enhance prospects for their children's future." Structural reforms in many of the region's economies, for example, could have noticeable impacts in improving economic performance and increasing revenues for investment in social and economic infrastructure. We can only measure real success when the world's desperate and disenfranchised turn away from extremism and turn toward freedom and opportunity.

While a moderate improvement has occurred since September 11th, our government should be investing substantially more than what it currently spends on programs to fight poverty around the globe. This assistance is invaluable toward enhancing countless lives -- while serving the dual purpose of improving our safety and security here at home.

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### Concluding Thoughts

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September 11th has often been called a "failure of imagination." We failed to imagine the gravity of the threat from determined, hateful enemies. And we failed to imagine our own weaknesses. On the fourth anniversary of September 11th, we continue to cherish the memories of those who were lost. As we rededicate ourselves to ensuring that the events of that horrible day are never repeated, let us not suffer another failure of imagination by doing too little to prevail in the struggle against violent extremism.

Even our best efforts to counteract the forces of Islamic fundamentalism are not guaranteed to work. We cannot hope to stop all terrorism or, as President Bush once promised, "to rid the world of evil." But over the course of time, we can drastically reduce our vulnerabilities by taking advantage of and making use of all the instruments available to us.

As much as we would like to dictate what tomorrow looks like, it is Muslims who will ultimately choose their own future. It is Muslims who will choose against being victimized and conquered by extremists claiming to profess true Islam. And it is Muslims who will expose the lies that make up terrorists ideologies.

Our role is to do everything in our power to make it easier for them to choose freedom by helping pave the way for reform. Terrorists exploit conditions of despair and feelings of resentment caused, in large part, by their own governments. We must be on the side of those promoting access to quality education, economic opportunity, and increased political pluralism. At times this will mean being at odds with the governments in the region, but every time we support the vision and reality of a freer, more hopeful, more prosperous future we deal a blow to the cause of extremism.

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## Topics for Further Inquiry

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This paper only scratches the surface of the issues and challenges facing the United States in the 21st century. Though many of the issues addressed in this paper relate to the Muslim world as a whole, it is largely focused on the Arab world. In the future, I hope to expand on these findings by exploring terrorism issues more intensively in the Muslim countries of Central and Southeast Asia, like Pakistan and Indonesia, to complete the picture painted here.

Another topic of great importance is non-proliferation. The most plausible and deadly threat facing the United States today is a weapon of mass destruction, particularly a nuclear weapon, falling into the hands of a terrorist group or hostile country. Al Qaeda has public announced its intention to use nuclear weapons and we know that other terrorist groups have attempted to obtain chemical, biological, and nuclear materials. With the threat of weapons of mass destruction being so great, we must redouble our efforts to lock down materials left over from the Cold War and to stop the development of new technologies by rogue regimes.

Finally, the issue of energy independence deserves further full and complete discussion. Energy is the single most important long-term challenge to the United States as a great power. Much of our history in the Middle East is the story of our dependence on their oil and the problems it has caused us. Ending our addiction to fossil fuels and becoming energy independent is a matter of both economic security and national security.

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## About the Author

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Marty Meehan is a Democratic congressman from Massachusetts. Congressman Meehan was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992. He is a member of the House Armed Services Committee and the House Judiciary Committee. He serves as Ranking Member of the Terrorism Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee which oversees the war on terror, U.S. special operations command, defense research and development, and other areas.

Congressman Meehan has twice visited U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and has traveled to other conflict areas including Northern Ireland and Kosovo. In January 2005 he published a white paper on U.S. policy in Iraq entitled *Iraq: The Light at the End of the Tunnel*.

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