

Rothman Presses Secretary of State to Commit to 'No ' Permanent U.S. Bases in Iraq

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Rothman Presses Secretary of State to Commit to 'No' Permanent U.S. Bases in Iraq; Her Answers Reveal Unclear Administration Policy in Iraq

(Washington, DC)— On Tuesday, April 4, Representative Steve Rothman (D-NJ) asked U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to say on the record that the U.S. will not build permanent military bases in Iraq. He also pressed her to explain the difference between a 'permanent' base and the 14 bases that the Pentagon has built in Iraq, which the Department of Defense characterizes as 'enduring'. Secretary Rice refused to offer an unequivocal statement against permanent U.S. bases and did not explain whether there is any difference between 'permanent' and 'enduring'.

"Calling a base in Iraq 'enduring' instead of 'permanent' doesn't change a thing," said Rothman. "The Administration's official position is that security responsibilities are shifting from U.S. to Iraqi forces, thereby allowing a reduction in U.S. troop levels in the near future. Unfortunately, the Administration's actions don't match that rhetoric. The 'enduring' bases paired with the Secretary's refusal to rule out permanent bases leads me to conclude that this President plans to keep our forces in Iraq for many years to come. The President even admitted this on March 21st when he said that our troops will be in Iraq at least through the end of 2008."

Citing a recent University of Maryland poll, Rothman pointed out that an overwhelming majority of Americans (71%) oppose the creation of permanent bases in Iraq, yet eighty percent (80%) of Iraqis believe the U.S. intends to retain a permanent presence in Iraq with or without the Iraqi government's approval.

"I cannot and will not support the Administration's funding requests with regard to the War in Iraq when it is clear that Iraqis are fighting a civil war and the Administration has no intention of redeploying our troops out of Iraq and out of harm's way," added Rothman.

Last February, Rothman publicly announced his support for redeploying all our troops out of Iraq within six months, depending on the most current timetable for ensuring their safe withdrawal. Since then, he has voted against additional emergency funding to support the Administration's 'stay the course' policy in Iraq and held town hall meetings throughout Northern New Jersey to provide constituents another opportunity to discuss his position on the Iraq War, in-person.

Rothman's questioning of Secretary Rice on this issue took place during a two-hour hearing on Tuesday afternoon before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee. As a Member of this Subcommittee, which makes recommendations on all U.S. foreign assistance, Rothman was among only 13 Members to have this opportunity to question Rice.

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