

Critics Won't Halt Iraq Surge, Bush Says

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WASHINGTON (AP) — [President Bush](#), facing opposition from both parties over his plan to send more troops to Iraq, said he has the authority to act no matter what Congress wants.

"I fully understand they could try to stop me from doing it. But I've made my decision. And we're going forward," Bush told CBS' "60 Minutes" in an interview to air Sunday night.



[Vice President Dick Cheney](#) asserted that lawmakers' criticism will not influence Bush's plans and he dismissed any effort to "run a war by committee."

"The president is the commander in chief. He's the one who has to make these tough decisions," Cheney said.

The defiant White House stance comes as both the House and Senate, now controlled by Democrats, prepare to vote on resolutions that oppose additional U.S. troops in Iraq. Cheney said those nonbinding votes would not affect Bush's ability to carry out his policies.

"He's the guy who's got to decide how to use the force and where to deploy the force," Cheney said. "And Congress obviously has to support the effort through the power of the purse. So they've got a role to play, and we certainly recognize that. But you also cannot run a war by committee."

Any attempts to block Bush's efforts would undermine the troops, Cheney said. He took particular aim at Democratic lawmakers who have blasted the president for increasing troops despite opposition from Congress, military advisers and a disgruntled electorate that in November ousted the GOP as the majority party on Capitol Hill.

"They have absolutely nothing to offer in its place," Cheney said of Democratic leaders. "I have yet to hear a coherent policy from the Democratic side."

Yet many Republican lawmakers, too, have begun to criticize Bush's war management. Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, for example, said last week he feared Bush's plan would be the worst foreign policy blunder since the [Vietnam War](#).

Responding to that, Cheney said the most dangerous blunder would be to give up on the global fight against terrorism because the United States has decided the war in Iraq is too difficult. That is just what America's terrorist enemies are counting on, he said.

"They're convinced that the United States will pack it in and go home if they just kill enough of us," Cheney said. "They can't beat us in a standup fight, but they think they can break our will."

Bush announced last week he will send 21,500 more troops to Iraq to halt violence, mainly around Baghdad, as an essential step toward stabilizing the country's government. That plan _ along with economic and political steps _ are meant to allow Iraqis to move ahead with securing the country themselves and allow U.S. troops to gradually return home.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates arrived in London for talks Sunday with [Prime Minister Tony Blair](#) on Bush's new approach in Iraq and Britain's plan to withdraw troops from southern Iraq.

Like Bush, though, Cheney braced Americans to frame the war in Iraq as part of a much longer effort.

"This is an existential conflict," Cheney said. "It is the kind of conflict that's going to drive our policy and our government for the next 20 or 30 or 40 years. We have to prevail and we have to have the stomach for the fight long term."

The White House also said Sunday that Iranians are aiding the insurgency in Iraq and the U.S. has the authority to pursue them because they "put our people at risk."

"We are going to need to deal with what Iran is doing inside Iraq," national security adviser Stephen Hadley said.

Added Cheney: "Iran is fishing in troubled waters inside Iraq."

The U.S. military in Baghdad said five Iranians arrested in northern Iraq last week were connected to an Iranian Revolutionary Guard faction that funds and arms insurgents in Iraq.

"We do not want them doing what they can to destabilize the situation inside Iraq," Cheney said.

Bush's revised war strategy seeks to isolate Iran and Syria, which the U.S. has accused of fueling attacks in Iraq. The president also says Iran and Syria have not done enough to block terrorists from entering Iraq over their borders.

"We know there are jihadists moving from Syria into Iraq. ... We know also that Iran is supplying elements in Iraq that are attacking Iraqis and attacking our forces," Hadley said.

"What the president made very clear is these are activities that are going on in Iraq that are unacceptable. They put our people at risk. He said very clearly that we will take action against those. We will interdict their operations, we will disrupt their supply lines, we will disrupt these attacks," Hadley said.

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Iran's government denied the five detainees were involved in financing and arming insurgents and said they should be released.

Hadley asserted that if Iranians in Iraq "are doing things that are putting are people at risk, of course we have the authority to go after them and protect our people."

Hadley sidestepped a question about whether U.S. forces would move across the border to pursue Iranians who are helping [Iraqi insurgents](#).

He said the priority "is what's going on inside Iraq. ... That's where we're going to deal with his problem."

Hadley was interviewed on "This Week" on ABC and "Meet the Press" on NBC. Cheney was on "[Fox News Sunday](#)."

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