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By John Donnelly, CQ Staff

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Democrats and some Republicans reacted with skepticism Monday to the upbeat assessment of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in President Bush's state of the Union speech.

Lawmakers wondered about the staying power of the military gains achieved in Iraq and questioned the operation's mounting costs — in lives, money and military readiness. And they worried about simmering situations elsewhere, chiefly in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

Democrats acknowledged they still lack the votes to force a withdrawal of troops from Iraq, yet some still intend to push for such votes, in addition to less-sweeping attempts to change Bush's war policies.

Jack Reed of Rhode Island, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a leading voice on war issues in the party, said Congress should at least go on record to say U.S. troops must redeploy from Iraq and move away from combat operations.

Reed said Bush's rosy depiction of the situation in Iraq sends exactly the wrong message to Iraq's leaders by relieving pressure on them to make progress on political reconciliation.

"The people in Baghdad are listening to the speech and they're thinking 'well in that case, we're fine,'" he said. "Until we start sending a message that they're really not doing all they should, then I don't think anything much will change."

Other Democrats, especially in the House, reacted to Bush's speech by again calling for curtailing or cutting off funding for continued combat operations.

Barbara Lee, D-Calif., a leader of the Progressive and Out of Iraq caucuses, said she wants Congress to approve timelines for an Iraq withdrawal when it considers the next war spending bill this spring.

"Not one more dime for combat operations," she said. "We will only provide the resources for a small, very narrow purpose, and that purpose is to end it and to bring our troops home."

Similarly, John P. Murtha, D-Pa., chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, said the costs are not tolerable.

"It is not a question of what happens to Iraq if we leave; it's a question of what happens to American if we stay," he said in a statement. "It's a question of whether America can afford to continue spending \$343 million every day in Iraq, while growing our national debt by nearly \$1 million every minute."

Some Republicans manifested misgivings about the course of world events, despite signs of progress in Iraq.

"The war on Iraq still weighs heavily on all of our minds as does the fragility of Afghanistan and the threatened instability in Pakistan," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

Last Speech

Bush used his last State of the Union address to vigorously defend his administration's policies abroad, but lawmakers expressed growing worries about the fate of U.S. interests in Iraq and beyond.

Bush cited progress in tamping down violence in Iraq and urged lawmakers to back his other top international priorities, including to isolate Iran, fight insurgents in Afghanistan and promote Israeli-Palestinian peace. In those and other initiatives, Bush asked for perseverance.

"We must do the difficult work today, so that years from now people will look back and say that this generation rose to the moment, prevailed in a tough fight, and left behind a more hopeful region and a safer America," he said.

Democrats however cast world events in a different and darker light, and not just in Iraq.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said the president's citations of progress in Iraq were familiar with ones from years past. But they ring increasingly hollow, he said, after five years and more than 4,000 dead and 35,000 wounded in that conflict.

Moreover, he said, instability in Afghanistan remains a threat. "Now, with a diminished focus and inadequate resources in Afghanistan, progress is threatened by exploding violence," Reid said. "The drug trade is running rampant. And today — 2,327 days since Sept. 11, (2001) — the world's number one terrorist, Osama bin Laden, remains free."

Bush acknowledged that much work remained in Iraq but contended that the nearly 25 percent buildup of troop levels he launched last year has driven violence down. He also noted that Iraq has made progress toward political unity, including by recently passing a law allowing for the reintegration of former members of Saddam Hussein's political party into government jobs.

"Some may deny the surge is working, but among the terrorists there is no doubt," Bush said. "Al Qaeda is on the run in Iraq, and this enemy will be defeated."

Bush urged Congress to provide all the money he has sought for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in fiscal 2008. Congress has yet to act on the bulk of his \$189.3 billion request for military operations, giving only \$70 billion, along with \$15.6 billion for heavy vehicles, in December (PL 110-161).

The speech was especially notable for his continued use of tough rhetoric toward the leaders of Iran, to whom he said: "Verifiably suspend your nuclear enrichment, so negotiations can begin. And to rejoin the community of nations, come clean about your nuclear intentions and past actions, stop your oppression at home, and cease your support for terror abroad. But above all, know this: America will confront those who threaten our troops, we will stand by our allies, and we will defend our vital interests in the Persian Gulf."

Bush also reminded Congress of other American ventures abroad, including the recent addition of 3,200 Marines to forces in Afghanistan, aid to democratic institutions in Lebanon and a continued push for Israeli-Palestinian peace. He also called on Congress to renew his global AIDS program at \$30 billion over the next five years and announced a new initiative to loosen "Buy American" restrictions on overseas food aid.

As expected, the president ignored Democrats' calls for him to state that no arm of the federal government will engage in any form of torture, including the controversial simulated drowning technique known as waterboarding, and to announce the shutdown of the prison for terrorism suspects at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., had a chilly response for the president's

request for more war funding. "The American people want their hard-earned tax dollars to be spent on priorities here at home — on homeland security, clean water, bridges, and roads — not on a disastrous nation-building adventure halfway around the world," Byrd said.

Meanwhile, GOP support for the president's war policies continued to run strong.

"Every measurement has changed for the positive," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. "I'm hoping that Congress will continue to support what's clearly a successful strategy. We've got a long way to go but it's moving in the right direction."

Edward Epstein, Josh Rogin, Adam Graham-Silverman and Matthew Johnson contributed to this story.