

# DESERET Morning News

## Talk of Iran war criticized

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The White House must tone down "dangerous" talk about going to war in Iran, the co-chairman of last year's bipartisan panel that criticized the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq war told reporters in Salt Lake City Tuesday.

"The rhetoric is escalating, and one of the things I think is important now is to dial down the rhetoric. You're in a situation now that is dangerous, and you've got to be careful," Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group, said.

A war in Iran, Hamilton said, "is a close call. I would not predict it either way at this point. I think it's a very, very serious possibility. ... It looks to me like we're trying the options. Will we stick with them? I don't know. I certainly hope we will."

Earlier this month, President Bush warned of "World War III" if Iran is allowed to have nuclear weapons, and Vice President Dick Cheney threatened "serious consequences" if the Iranian government did not abandon efforts to get them.

Hamilton, a former Indiana congressman who also served as vice-chairman of the 9/11 Commission, said diplomatic sanctions must be used against Iran before military options are considered.

"The military options are not very good," he said, suggesting they could include bombing nuclear installations or sending forces to briefly confront the military guard. "Iran has a lot of ways they could retaliate."

Financial sanctions taken this week by the United States against Iran will cause "pain, but I doubt that that it's enough to change their behavior," he said. Still, Hamilton said, there is time for further diplomatic efforts to stop Iran's nuclear program.

He said further sanctions against Iran by the United Nations are a next step. However, the unpopularity of the Iraq war "makes it more difficult for us because we simply don't have the support of countries around the world."

Last December, the Iraq Study Group recommended shifting from combat to training Iraqi soldiers and police so many troops could be withdrawn by early 2008. New Middle East diplomatic efforts, including high-level dialog with Iran and Syria, were also proposed.

The findings of the bipartisan group, Hamilton said, were "basically rejected" by Bush because "the president is seeking a military victory there. He was a year ago and still is. ... Our major thrust was what you may call a responsible exit."

The administration's troop surge, he said, "has improved the security situation somewhat. But the question has never been whether U.S. forces can clear an area. We've always had that capability. The question is can you hold it and build, and that remains to be seen."

Hamilton answered questions about the possibility of a new war with Iran before speaking about the need for civic education at the annual Dialogue on Democracy dinner sponsored by the Utah Coalition for Civic, Character and Service Learning.

Now head of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., Hamilton is also scheduled to speak at the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics at 10:45 a.m.

Wednesday. His talk will be open to the public.

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