

In case you missed it, Congressman Pence, Ranking Member of the Middle East Subcommittee, appeared on the NewsHour last night to defend President Bush's new strategy for Iraq. Excerpts appear below. For a full transcript, click [here](#).

GWEN IFILL: You have been to Iraq four times. You met with the president last Tuesday at the White House about his new plan, and you support it. Why?

REP. MIKE PENCE: Well, frankly, I went into the meeting with the president in the West Wing last week very skeptical about the troop surge.

During all of my trips into Iraq, our military commanders have told me again and again that a large American military footprint in Iraq is actually counterproductive to our interests there and the interests of freedom.

What I found very persuasive, Gwen, was this president didn't just lay out a plan for more troops. He laid out a new strategy, including new tactics, new rules of engagement on the ground, and a plan very much to work alongside Iraqi military forces to put a priority on securing Baghdad.

And I think it's a plan that we owe it to our military, we owe it to the interests of freedom, and the good people of Iraq to see through this new strategy, this new way forward.

GWEN IFILL: What were your initial doubts?

REP. MIKE PENCE: There was a general consensus that I heard from our military leaders that, in order to ensure that the Iraqi military would step up and the Iraqi government would take responsibility, that we ought to be moving always in the direction of a smaller American military presence there.

Of course, all that counsel predated the extraordinary increase in violence that commenced late summer 2006. It's clear that what our strategy and our tactics on the ground were at the time were not working. And this change in strategy, this addition of six additional brigades to support an Iraqi-led effort to bring domestic security to Baghdad, I think is an idea whose time has come.

GWEN IFILL: Congressman, how would you define success in this venture, and how would you define failure?

REP. MIKE PENCE: Well, I certainly would not define success as the arrival in Baghdad of a peaceable Jeffersonian democracy that has the strength of the institutions that our democracy has after 200 years.

I believe success can be defined as that moment that, with absolute certainty, the United States of America can depart from Iraq, knowing that the Iraqi military and the Iraqi government have the ability to defend their new democracy effectively.

Defining democracy as the absence of violence, the absence of insurgent violence, the absence of terrorist activity in Iraq, I believe, is imprudent, and we ought to rather look for that moment that we can bring our troops home with the confidence that freedom has won in Iraq.

GWEN IFILL: There is so much discussion going on right now up here on Capitol Hill about

capping the number of troops, or making sure that Congress gets to vote on any increase in troops, or not withdrawal so much, but changing the approach. The president seems to be resisting some of that.

What do you think Congress's role should be?

REP. MIKE PENCE: Well, I believe the role of Congress and of the president are clearly defined in the Constitution of the United States.

Article I gives the Congress the authority to declare war and the authority to appropriate funds for military operations. Article II of the Constitution says the president of the United States is the commander-in-chief of Armed Forces.

And while I think Congress has a role here, Congress ought to ask questions, we ought to consider very carefully, as we continue to appropriate the resources of the American people to this and other military enterprises, I do not consider it appropriate for the Congress, both collectively or individually, to be in the business of imposing tactical decisions in the field on our commander-in-chief.

I am categorically opposed to capping troop levels. I'm categorically opposed to any effort that would attempt to change the 535 members of Congress into a surrogate commander-in-chief or secretary of defense. That is the role of the president of the United States ever since our Congress hired General George Washington to be our first commander-in-chief.

GWEN IFILL: You were home in Indiana this weekend. What are your constituents telling you about the president's plan?

REP. MIKE PENCE: There's no question, but that, even in the heartland of America, people are troubled with our lack of progress in Iraq. They are hesitant to accept the president's new strategy.

And I believe it's incumbent on the president and all of us in Congress who support this new strategy to communicate to the American people that this is not simply more troops for more troops' sake. It is a new strategy, a new tactic, and it's a strategy that puts the Iraqi military and the Iraqi government on the line and in the lead.