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Corzine sees no fast end to Iraq

Dem Senator says exit next year won't be possible.

Sunday, August 08, 2004

By **TERRENCE DOPP**
The Express-Times

WOODBURY, N.J. -- U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine on Friday called an early withdrawal of troops from Iraq a "pipe dream" and said America will likely maintain a military presence in that nation at least through 2006.

During an editorial board meeting with reporters and editors from The Gloucester County Times, Corzine said the war has diverted attention from the campaign against global terrorism. He also urged greater international cooperation in securing and rebuilding the Middle East nation.

"If the American people think we are going to get out of there by 2005 or 2006, we are absolutely misleading them," said Corzine, D-N.J. "There is no early, easy exit strategy. We are now, in my view, committed for the protection and security of the U.S. to a long-term commitment in Iraq."

"We need to offer something to the international community to give reason to think we are good-willed about asking them to participate," Corzine said.

He accused president George W. Bush of misleading the nation into war based on faulty evidence Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and failing to harbor participation in the coalition securing Iraq.

France, Germany and Russia all refused to back the March 2003 invasion and have since been locked out of reconstruction contracts by the Bush administration.

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry has called finding a way to forge this cooperation a vital part of his exit strategy.

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Corzine also said the war in Iraq has diverted the nation's resources from catching Osama Bin Laden, architect of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, who he said would likely be in U.S. custody if the military had upwards of 140,000 troops in Afghanistan.

"We didn't get our priorities right," he said, adding Bush's foreign policy decisions have isolated the United States and hurt the campaign against terror. "Because we picked this fight we've create a great risk."

Topics of the meeting Friday spanned a Corzine initiative to establish a government-administered savings plan for children to the country's economic vitality.

Under the so-called "Kids Account" program, the government would establish an individual investment account for every newborn in order to encourage savings, promote financial well-being and expand opportunities.

Corzine introduced the legislation July 22 along with Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa. Through a mix of private contributions and government matches, Corzine estimated the accounts could swell to as great as \$23,000 by age 18.

Withdrawals would be permitted only to finance education, purchase a home or to transfer the funds to a retirement account, under the legislation. Terrence Dopp is Trenton correspondent for The Express-Times. He can be reached at 609-292-5154 or by e-mail at tdopp@sjnewsco.com.

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