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House Iraq Vote Spells Trouble Ahead for War Effort

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The House's nonbinding resolution against the Bush Administration's new strategy for Iraq is only the first skirmish in what is likely to be a bitter struggle over the future of U.S. policy in Iraq. Democrats in the House engineered a 246 to 182 vote by crafting a resolution that enabled House members to take a cost-free symbolic stand against President Bush's "new way forward" without taking responsibility for proposing a coherent alternative policy. This resolution, a rare rebuke to the nation's commander in chief in a time of war, is the first step in what will be a protracted campaign to hamstring President Bush's Middle East policy and undermine his constitutional authority as commander in chief. At stake is not only the fate of Iraq but also the outcome of the war against terrorism and of U.S. efforts to contain Iran, as well as the ability of future American presidents to fight and win wars.

House Democrats already have signaled that they intend to escalate their efforts to block the Administration's plans in Iraq by placing restrictions on the funds and resources needed to implement the Administration's new counterinsurgency strategy. Representative John Murtha (D-PA), chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, has indicated that he will seek to attach conditions to the \$93 billion supplemental defense appropriation due to be voted on next month that will make it impossible for the Administration to follow through with its promising new strategy. Murtha intends to legislatively impose restrictions on the deployment of

military units to Iraq by stipulating that they must meet certain requirements for equipment, training, and time between deployments. By cynically masking his proposals as efforts to enhance military readiness, Representative Murtha seeks to sabotage the surge strategy.

Democrats hope to sidestep the charge that they are undermining the troops during wartime by imposing restrictions by legislative fiat, rather than direct cuts to funding. But blocking reinforcements would put the lives of the troops already deployed in Iraq at greater risk. And those troops now in Iraq are likely to face extended deployments if Congress delays the deployment of their replacements. This kind of congressional micromanagement not only undermines the flexibility of the forces available to military commanders and reduces the overall effectiveness of the war effort, but it also impinges on the President's powers as commander in chief. Such legislation could provoke a constitutional clash over presidential war powers.

If the Democratic-controlled Congress does succeed in choking off the troop reinforcements and resources needed to implement the Bush Administration's Iraq strategy, then it must assume responsibility for the resulting disaster.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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By undercutting the Administration's Iraq policy, Congress risks fatally undermining the Iraqi government, allowing Iraq to slide into a much more bloody sectarian civil war, and handing Iran, Syria, and al-Qaeda a major victory. A rush-to-exit strategy also risks abandoning Iraqis to a humanitarian catastrophe far worse than the murderous ethnic cleansing in the Balkans that led to two U.S. interventions there in the 1990s and even worse than the tragic bloodletting in Darfur today. Pulling the plug on the war in Iraq also will help create the condi-

tions for many future wars. A defeat in Iraq will increase the likelihood that future U.S. military interventions will be needed to combat a resurgent al-Qaeda, contain spillover effects that threaten Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan, and confront an increasingly aggressive Iran.

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