

WebMemo



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After the Veto: Next Steps for Congress on the War Funding Bill

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Last week, Congress passed irresponsible legislation that holds hostage funding for combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Members of Congress knew when they voted on the bill that the President would consider it unacceptable and veto it. The President's position is correct, and Congress must make haste to send the President a law he can sign. Anything less will put the lives of American soldiers in battle at risk, undermine vital national interests, risk embroiling America even more deeply in the Middle East, and give Americans the false hope that cutting and running will make the world a better place.

Law and Disorder. For at least four reasons, Congress was wrong to set a fixed timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in its supplemental defense appropriations bill:

1. **Success is an option.** When the Senate approved the appointment of General David Petraeus to command U.S. troops in Iraq, he told them there is no U.S. military solution to Iraq's problems but that American troops are needed to help Iraq prepare to govern and protect itself. He laid out a strategy to create the conditions for a responsible withdrawal of combat forces. The plan consists of breaking the spiral of violence in Baghdad, building the capacity of the Iraqi military to take over responsibility for security, and fostering effective and responsive Iraqi governance. He said it would take until to June to deploy the troops needed to the job, until September to conclude whether progress is possible, and then more

time to finish the mission and bring the troops home. He returned to Washington last week and told Congress that his views have not changed. In response, Congress declared failure and ordered the troops home.

2. **There is a war to be won.** The fact that both al-Qaeda and Iran have rushed into Iraq to throw gasoline on the fire, fueling sectarian violence in an effort to make the country ungovernable, only demonstrates that the U.S. faces vicious, opportunistic, and relentless enemies who are willing to murder innocents and thwart peace in order to further their own expansionist agendas. Today, there is solid intelligence that sectarian violence is on the decline, and Iran and al-Qaeda are redoubling efforts to reverse this trend. Cutting and running would hand these enemies of freedom a victory and encourage more aggression.
3. **Walking away will not end the war.** Withdrawal would leave behind those working to throw Iraq into chaos, and the likely results would be a humanitarian disaster and a regional proxy war. Withdrawal would not end America's involvement in the Long War any more than abandoning the South Vietnamese

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ended the Cold War. After the defeat in Vietnam, America's enemies became emboldened, sponsoring violence in South America, Africa, and Asia. In response, the United States had to increase military spending and engage on new fronts. The world became a more dangerous place after the U.S. cut and ran from Vietnam. A similar result is likely if the U.S. abandons Iraq. America cannot simply ignore the problems that running away would cause.

4. **Polls do not make Americans safer.** Congress knew that an anti-war bill would "poll well" because many Americans are disillusioned over the lack of tangible progress in turning Iraq over to the Iraqis. Public opinion polls, however, do not make America safe, free, and prosperous. Promising Americans that cutting and running from Iraq is the answer to the nation's

national security challenges is disingenuous. Only an America that stands up for its vital interests can make America safer.

Congress Should Support the Troops. Members of Congress knew they were passing a sure-to-be-vetoed bill. They knew that no President could accept the consequences of cutting and running. Delay will harm U.S. interests, undermine the training and readiness of the armed forces, and jeopardize the lives of young soldiers on the battlefield today. Congress should give the President a bill he can sign.

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