

# WebMemo



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## “Cut and Run Lite”: Congressional Iraq Proposal Puts Troops at Risk

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This week, the Senate will resume debate on the fiscal year 2008 defense authorization bill. It will consider an amendment by Senator Jim Webb (D-VA) to prohibit the deployment of any soldiers, sailors, airmen, or Marines to Iraq or Afghanistan unless they have spent as much or more time at home than deployed overseas. The amendment also prohibits the deployment of any unit or member of a Reserve component (including the National Guard) that has been deployed at any time within the last three years. The goal of this legislation is to limit the options available to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, thereby tying Pentagon planners' hands and forcing a de facto drawdown of U.S. force levels in Iraq. This legislation would undermine how America fights wars while limiting the flexibility necessary for the Secretary of Defense to effectively oversee military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Senate should continue to reject the cut-and-run approach.

**Sacrificing Progress Is Tragic.** Defense Secretary Robert Gates recently told *The Los Angeles Times*, “Clearly there is hard work that remains in some [areas], but the situation in others is in pretty good shape.” General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker echoed this sentiment last week in their report and testimony before Congress. None of the recent progress in Iraq would have been possible without the flexibility to put troops on the ground when and where they are needed to perform the missions that will safe-

guard the lives of U.S. soldiers, protect U.S. interests, and help the Iraqis. Taking that flexibility away jeopardizes everything.

Congress should not mandate individual soldier or unit deployment lengths. Proposals along these lines are little more than transparent attempts to hamstring the military's ability to support combat operations, particularly in Iraq. Such restrictions would be the first step toward cutting and running and abandoning the military's hard-fought progress to forces that want to kill, exploit, and oppress the Iraqi people.

**War by Committee Is a Disaster.** Congress's limiting troop movements is unrealistic and would not serve to make America safer. Armies rarely go into battle with all the personnel, equipment, and training they need. With such standards in place, Americans would never have fought at Trenton, Cantigny, the Battle of the Bulge, or the Chosin Reservoir. No army could fight and win with these kinds of restrictions. In addition, legislative delays on committing troops—even with a so-called waiver authority—would place soldiers already on the ground at far greater risk. Even a proposal that allows the President to waive restrictions based on

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military necessity is risky. Waiver criteria would be controversial, using waivers would leave the President open to criticism, and delays in obtaining waivers could cost lives.

Restricting what personnel are available to the President, Secretary of Defense, service chiefs, and combatant commanders could ultimately make Americans at home less safe. If another flare up occurs outside of Iraq and U.S. units were unable to rapidly respond and prevent conflict, American safety would be on the line unnecessarily.

#### **Micromanaging the Pentagon Is a Mistake.**

Current Army policy already provides no less than one year at home for soldiers deployed for 15 months. With the likely drawdown of U.S. forces to “pre-surge” levels, this will ensure no units serve beyond 15 months. Those soldiers who must serve beyond one year in combat are paid an additional \$1,000 per month or receive additional time off. (Active-duty soldiers receive one day off for every month their deployment extends beyond 12 months in a three-year period. If deployment extends to more than 18 months out of 36, two days per month are granted.) Active-duty Marines are sent on seven-month combat tours, with six months at home between deployments. The Defense Department’s current policy for members of the Reserve component is one year deployed and five years stateside, unless the soldier volunteers for repeat tours.

Defense officials and military leaders have repeatedly said that 15-month deployments are the worst-case scenario and that the department will eventually return to a 12-month deployment schedule, with two years at home between deployments.

Army Secretary Pete Geren testified before Congress in June that the Army is constantly reviewing options to relieve pressure on active-duty soldiers, such as relying more heavily on reservists and using sister services for help. Though there is no doubt that America is asking much of its ground forces, 45 percent of Marines and 37 percent of Army soldiers had never deployed for various reasons, such as their skill sets and current locations overseas, according to a June Associated Press analysis. These numbers do not warrant Congress dictating in law operational deployment decisions that should be determined based upon the needs of battlefield commanders.

**Stop the Insanity.** Congress’s mandating deployment schedules would put U.S. forces and Americans at risk unnecessarily. Mandating deployment schedules would limit the Commander in Chief’s flexibility during war and would be the first step toward cutting and running in Iraq.

The President has authorized a significant draw-down of U.S. forces in Iraq that will eventually alleviate the need to require lengthy deployments or reduced time between tours. The Department of Defense, meanwhile, is taking adequate steps to address extended deployments. Congress should not be in the business of dictating troop deployment policies, especially when its actions risk U.S. troops’ hard-fought gains.

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