

## Op-Ed: Ending the War

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Ending the war: Take 7

Democrats Renew Effort to Cut War Funds

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By STEVE ROTHMAN

THIS WEEK, for the seventh time this year, Democrats in the House of Representatives passed legislation to force President Bush to withdraw our troops from Iraq. I supported it.

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether 10 Republicans in the Senate will join the 50 Democrats who will support the House efforts. Their backing is necessary to end an expected filibuster and pass the bill. Then, we can only hope that the American people will persuade the president not to veto it and finally change his direction in Iraq.

As it stands today, more than 4½ years after we started this war, the situation in Iraq for U.S. troops has worsened. More American soldiers and Marines have been killed in Iraq so far this year than ever before—a total of 857 versus the previous high of 849 in all of 2004. To date, more than 3,860 of our brave young men and women have been killed in Iraq, with 38,164 wounded.

Also, while our global economic and military competitors have been pouring resources into their education, health care, transportation infrastructures and militaries, under President Bush, half a trillion U.S. taxpayer dollars have been spent on the Iraq war and a half a trillion dollars more is projected for the physical and mental health care costs for our Iraq war veterans.

Beyond the terrible price in the blood of our troops killed and wounded, the dollars spent and the opportunities lost to our country, there have been other awful, unintended consequences of this war.

## Region is destabilized

One hundred thousand Iraqi civilians are dead and 4 million displaced, which is the equivalent of 1.2 million American civilians killed and 48 million forced to flee their homes. This mass exodus has destabilized the region around Iraq and, with the mounting death toll, we are viewed by people throughout the Middle East and the entire world as occupiers, torturers and murderers of Muslim civilians.

We have strengthened Iran by eliminating its biggest threat, Saddam Hussein. The price of oil on the world market has tripled, in no small measure due to the tensions we have introduced into Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the prosecution of this war has diminished America's standing in the world as a beacon of hope and an able leader of international affairs.

Finally, we took a country, Iraq, where there were virtually no al-Qaida terrorists when we invaded and allowed them a small, but visible presence, albeit in a country of 26 million Iraqis. Bush uses al-Qaida to claim Iraq is part of our battle against international terrorism. He is either being disingenuous or is simply an incompetent commander-in-chief.

The notion that we must continue to commit 130,000 to 165,000 U.S. troops to handle fewer than 1,000 al-Qaida in Iraq, when we have trained 350,000 Iraqi soldiers for this purpose, is preposterous.

Further, deploying our troops to police the Iraqi civil war, while Osama bin Laden remains free and al-Qaida and other terrorists coordinate worldwide operations from Pakistan and Afghanistan, is an appalling misuse of our military.

Instead, we must change course. We must focus on our needs at home by securing our ports, borders, chemical plants and other targets. We must address the anti-American terrorists in more than 60 countries around the world, including Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## Rebuild our armed forces

We must rebuild our depleted armed forces to prepare for any future security threats posed by North Korea, China, Russia, or Iran. We must reinvigorate diplomatic efforts, on a bilateral, regional, and international basis, which will help the Iraqis keep order, come to agreement on power-sharing and deter Iranian and Syrian trouble-making.

The Democratic majority in Congress wants U.S. involvement in Iraq to come to an end. So does the majority of Americans. Unfortunately, Bush and his supporters in Congress are trying to run out the clock, leaving this mess to the next president.

Americans must let Bush and his followers know that no one who supports staying the course in Iraq will be reelected—and that any political party that does not repudiate the president's Iraq policies will see rejection at the polls.

Jan. 20, 2009, when a new president takes office, is 14 months away. Our country, Iraq and the world cannot wait until then.

The Democratic majority in the House continues to press this issue—even without the numbers to override the president's veto. Democrats will not give up. Too much is at stake.

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