

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 1474
May 25, 2007

Bush Administration Scores Victory on Iraq Vote

Helle C. Dale and James Phillips

The Bush Administration scored an important political victory yesterday when both houses of Congress voted to approve a long-overdue supplemental defense appropriation for Iraq and Afghanistan. The legislation will provide \$100 billion for the military campaigns in those two countries and \$17 billion for domestic spending added by congressional Democrats, part of which will go to the military (for equipment, medical care, and housing) and part to Hurricane Katrina relief. At the White House's insistence, \$4 billion in other pork-barrel spending has been shaved off the bill. But the most important win for the White House was the omission of Democrat proposals for a timeline to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq. Such a timeline would have been devastating to military strategy and troop morale. In passing the war-funding bill with convincing majorities of 280-142 in the House and 86-14 in the Senate, Congress has finally carried out its obligation to fund the American troops on the frontlines of the global war against terrorism.

President Bush vetoed Congress's first defense supplemental bill on May 1 because it was larded with pork for domestic programs and required a pullout of most U.S. troops from Iraq by March 31, 2008. This would have led to a disastrous defeat in the war against al-Qaeda, with a cascade of dangerous consequences for regional stability, the struggle to contain Iran, and efforts to stave off an all-out civil war and humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq. Moreover, the deadline for troop with-

drawals infringed on the President's authority as Commander in Chief of the armed forces, a precedent that would have tied the hands of future presidents in any future wars.

The Bush Administration was forced to accept benchmarks for the Iraqi government's progress tied to the level of U.S. reconstruction aid. The 18 benchmarks in the bill include progress toward national reconciliation, laws to disarm militias, equal legal protection for all sects, and passing and implementing legislation for the equitable sharing of oil revenues among all Iraqis. Failure by the Iraqi government to meet certain benchmarks could lead to problems in the future if U.S. aid for reconstruction is cut, undermining Iraq's national reconciliation process, reducing American leverage over Iraq's fractious government, and reducing Iraqi incentives for meeting future benchmarks. The President does have the power to waive penalties if he deems it necessary, which is why some Democrats complain that the bill is "toothless."

Overall, this defense supplemental is a major improvement over the irresponsible previous bill. Hopefully, the Republican congressional support

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/MiddleEast/wm1474.cfm

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

which enabled the administration to withstand the “rush to exit” strategy pushed by the “Out of Iraq” caucus will continue through the fall, when the Iraq war will again be debated as Congress takes up the annual defense budget.

—*Helle C. Dale is Director of, and James Phillips is Research Fellow for Middle Eastern Affairs in, the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation. Graham Owen, a Research Assistant, assisted in the preparation of the paper.*