

Title:

Why Democrats Should Fund The War

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Summary:

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To be sure, as everyone knows, the American people quite strongly support the notion of cutting off funding for the war in the absence of achieving benchmarks of success for the war in Iraq. And at this point,...

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Article Body:

Democrats will be making a profound mistake if they follow through on Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's insistence that the party will refuse to provide any funding for the war in Iraq, absent some benchmarks for withdrawal of our troops at least by September 2008.

To be sure, as everyone knows, the American people quite strongly support the notion of cutting off funding for the war in the absence of achieving benchmarks of success for the war in Iraq. And at this point, given the failure of our efforts in Iraq to either stabilize the situation on the ground or to provide the basis for political reconciliation, this is an entirely understandable reaction-one that I share. But as a matter of policy and politics it is simply the wrong judgment. If as is expected, President Bush vetoes the Democrats' legislation that sets a timetable, a stalemate will inevitably result. President Bush will argue, as he already has begun to do, that American troops are being put at risk and the military campaign jeopardized. He will argue that the Democrats are undermining the war effort, as well as national security. The failure to negotiate in good faith, he will maintain, proves the Democrats lack a commitment to protecting our troops and doing what is right.

And while in the short term, the president's arguments can be rebutted, the longer term presents real problems for the Democrats. If the party proves to be

intransigent about continuing funding for the war and refuses to even meet the president to discuss the subject, they provide the Republicans with an issue that can be used against them in the run up to election day in 2008.

It is the so called "clean bill" simply providing funding for the war that offers the greatest hope to Democrats going forward. By compromising with the White House-even if it be largely on the president's terms-the Democrats will be able to maintain the high ground with swing voters. At the same time, there is every reason to believe that Democrats can-and indeed should-continue to criticize the prosecuting of the war for its failure to promote political reconciliation, end sectarian violence, and develop an equitable distribution of oil revenue. They should give the President the funding he seeks now, as Senator Carl Levin has suggested, so that there can be no claim that Democrats are undermining the war effort.

Sadly, the most likely result is that the war will continue to go badly. And while that is a very bad result for the United States and our troops, it will take away the only potent argument Republicans have against the Democrats: they are too partisan, they are unwilling to compromise, and that they have jeopardized national security.

Rest assured, the appetite of the American people for this conflict is well beyond its limit. And by working to provide funding for the war with no strings attached, the Democrats will avoid allowing the Republicans to distract the American people from the failed policies of the Bush administration. To be sure, if things do not take a turn for the better on the ground, it is only a matter of time before Republicans as well begin defecting from the White House line. And that matter of time is measured in months not years.

So rather than risking confrontation with the Commander in Chief, the Democrats should provide the funding the White House is seeking for the war effort all the while making it clear that they have not in any way abandoned their commitment to a specific timetable to conclude the war effort as well as benchmarks of success that should be reached along the way.