



Congress Gives In On War Funding. Now can we fight the enemy?

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The war over the war in Washington is quiet for the moment. Congress has finally appropriated funds for America's warriors without setting a deadline for their defeat. Now the president can turn his undivided attention to fighting the enemies who are attacking our soldiers.

Op-ed writers (and presidential candidates) will of course continue in the coming months to deny the obvious: That we are fighting (*pace* John Edwards) a real war on terror; that Iraq is, as al Qaeda says it is, the war's central front; and that the Iranians and Syrians are actively supporting our enemies. But the Bush administration, with congressional obstruction on hold, can move ahead with policies that deal with reality.

The reality is that foreign fighters are flowing into Iraq to kill Iraqis and Americans. Almost all suicide bombers in Iraq are foreign fighters, for whom this is the crucial battle. This means that our victory there will be an important victory in the larger struggle against terrorism--and our defeat there would embolden and empower our enemies. And the reality is that Iran and Syria are enemies. Most foreign fighters join al Qaeda in Iraq via Syria. And Iran has been sending advanced weapons and advisers into Iraq. These weapons and insurgents supported by Iran are killing our soldiers on a daily basis. There should be no doubt about the hostile role Iran and Syria are playing in Iraq today.

General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker are already focused on these realities. They've just completed a strategic review and are pursuing a joint campaign plan to win the war. But even as the leaders of the political and military effort in the theater work to grapple with real problems, some in the Bush administration continue to toy with exit strategies and diplomatic strategies that imperil the victory strategy the president has embraced.

The ghost of Donald Rumsfeld lives in some quarters of the Bush administration. See, for example, the repeated suggestions by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates that the administration might pull the plug on the current strategy in September and begin a drawdown, and the appointment of a known skeptic of the strategy as "war czar." Some officials still speak as if what matters most in Iraq is to turn over responsibility to Iraqi forces forthwith. But the Iraqi army, while gaining in experience and effectiveness as rapidly as one might expect, is still too small to make up for the withdrawal of the 170,000 U.S. soldiers actively engaged in establishing order. And there are still bad actors within the Iraqi government and security forces that are pursuing sectarian agendas. The Petraeus-Crocker campaign plan recognizes this fact. Moving to withdraw U.S. forces in the coming months--even expressing eagerness to remove U.S. forces prematurely--empowers extremists within the Iraqi government just as they are beginning to lose power, and offers al Qaeda forces the chance to regain the positions in the

Sunni community they are steadily being forced to yield.

Meanwhile, the State Department toys with fantasy diplomatic solutions based on overtures toward Iran and Syria. The Iranian regime has resolved to help Iraqi militants kill as many Americans as possible. The Syrian regime permits al Qaeda terrorists to move into Iraq for the same purpose every day. These actions are not the result of some sort of miscommunication that could be cleared up with a frank discussion of real interests. They represent policy decisions in Tehran and Damascus to defeat us in Iraq. Diplomatic engagement by itself is a trap, at least until we have turned the tide in Iraq and regained leverage.

Congressional battles calling into doubt our commitment to winning in Iraq have been the major threat to progress since the president began pursuing the right strategy in January. The president, supported by congressional Republicans, has beaten back that threat. Now he needs to deal with his own administration, which has not made up its collective mind to support the president's strategy wholeheartedly. Mixed messages from Bush's advisers and cabinet undermine the efforts of our commanders in the field. The president adopted a new strategy four months ago. The new commander took over three months ago, and the new ambassador not long after. All the military units will soon be in place, and the provincial reconstruction teams constituted. This is no time to hedge or hesitate. Now is the time to put everything behind mak-

ing the president's strategy--which succeed.
looks to be a winning strategy--

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