

Presidential Candidates Positions and Actions on the Iraq War (Compiled December 10, 2007)

This summary provides a brief look at the voting records, legislative initiatives and positions of those running to be President. It focuses upon the Democratic presidential candidates since each claims to be in favor of reducing the U.S. troop presence in Iraq and eventually bringing the U.S. occupation of Iraq to an end in some form. Four of the Democratic candidates are current Senators and one is a current Representative, which means they have a voting record in the Senate to be examined. Representative Kucinich's voting record on Iraq is clear: he voted against the war authorization in 2002 and voted against every Iraq war supplemental spending bill. The four Democratic Senator's records are similar but also have distinct differences. It is also useful to trace the evolution of their voting records on the Iraq war. Thus the bulk of this summary focuses upon the 4 current Democratic Senators.

On the Republican side of the race to be President, the positions of the candidates are very clear. Except for Representative Ron Paul, each Republican candidate supports the current status quo in Iraq. Representative Paul voted consistently against the Iraq war. He voted against the authorization to go to war in 2002 and voted against each Iraq war supplemental spending bill.

Senator Hillary Clinton

Senator Clinton voted for the 2002 authorization to go to war against Iraq. She voted for each Iraq war funding bill in 2003, 2005 and 2006. In April 2007 she voted in favor of the Iraq war funding bill that required that U.S. troops begin to be withdrawn from Iraq, though lacking a firm deadline for completion of withdrawal. In May 2007 she voted against the final version of the Iraq war supplemental which lacked any troop withdrawal language.

In November 2007, Clinton voted in FAVOR of cloture on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill that would have set a goal of December 15, 2008 for the redeployment of U.S. combat troops from Iraq. This measure would have provided an additional \$50 billion for the Iraq – Afghanistan war. She voted AGAINST cloture on the alternative spending bill submitted by Senator McConnell which would have provided the funds but without any timetable for withdrawal (this vote prevented the McConnell bill from coming to a vote in the Senate).

In May 2006, Clinton voted in favor of cloture—a motion to end debate and bring an issue to a vote—on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill. At the time of this vote, an amendment by Senator Feingold to set a timetable for withdrawal was pending on the Senate floor. By voting for cloture Senator Clinton voted to prevent this amendment from being voted upon.

In June 2006, Clinton voted AGAINST a measure that required the redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq begin during 2006 and be completed by July 1, 2007. She voted in FAVOR of an alternative measure that the President should submit to Congress by the end of 2006 a plan for the phased redeployment of troops from Iraq, but without Congress setting any timetable for withdrawal (Clinton was a co-sponsor of the alternative).

In February 2007, Clinton submitted a Senate bill that sought to set a cap on the number of troops in Iraq at approximately 125,000 to 130,000 troops (the number present in Iraq before the President announced his “surge” strategy). This bill calls for a phased redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq, but does not set any timetable for withdrawal.

In September 2007, Senator Clinton voted in FAVOR of a Feingold sponsored measure which required the U.S. to begin redeploying troops from Iraq within 90 days and prohibited the expenditure of funds after June 30, 2008 except for the following purposes: “(1) To conduct targeted operations, limited in duration and scope, against members of al Qaeda and affiliated international terrorist organizations. (2) To provide security for United States Government personnel and infrastructure. (3) To provide training to members of the Iraqi Security Forces who have not been involved in sectarian violence or in attacks upon the United

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States Armed Forces, provided that such training does not involve members of the United States Armed Forces taking part in combat operations or being embedded with Iraqi forces. (4) To provide training, equipment, or other materiel to members of the United States Armed Forces to ensure, maintain, or improve their safety and security.”

Also in September 2007, Senator Clinton voted in FAVOR of the Levin – Reed Amendment that required that redeployment of U.S. forces begin within 90 days and that transition to a different mission be completed within 9 months (or June 2008). The new mission would include: “(1) Protecting United States and Coalition personnel and infrastructure.; (2) Training, equipping, and providing logistic support to the Iraqi Security Forces. (3) Engaging in targeted counter terrorism operations against al Qaeda, al Qaeda affiliated groups, and other international terrorist organizations.”

In addition to key differences in the mission for remaining U.S. military forces, the Levin – Reed amendment did not contain a provision for ending military expenditures in Iraq after June 30, 2008.

On Senator Clinton’s campaign website, she states that, if elected President, she will convene a meeting of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the express purpose of devising a plan to begin the redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq within the first 60 days of assuming office. She also lays out her proposed diplomatic and economic initiatives. (see <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/news/speech/view/?id=2366>).

Senator Clinton adopts the strategy of a phased redeployment of U.S. troops from Iraq, but without indicating any timetable for such a redeployment. As stated in her Senate bill, Clinton’s strategy would leave U.S. forces in Iraq (assuming the Iraqi government meets certain specified benchmarks) for the purposes of: “(a) training Iraqi security forces; (b) providing logistic support of Iraqi security forces; (c) protecting United States personnel and infrastructure; and (d) participating in targeted counter-terrorism activities.”

Senator Clinton does not provide an estimate of how many U.S. troops would remain in Iraq under her plan. However, in March 2007, Erik Leaver of the Institute for Policy Studies examined similar language in a House war spending bill and estimated that it could potentially leave 40,000 to 60,000 U.S. troops in Iraq.

Senator Barack Obama

Barack Obama, as candidate for the Senate in the fall of 2002, publicly expressed opposition to the pending Iraq war and was elected to the Senate in 2004. He voted for each Iraq war funding bill in 2005 and 2006. In April 2007 he voted in favor of the Iraq war funding bill that required that U.S. troops begin to be withdrawn from Iraq, though lacking a firm deadline for completion of withdrawal. In May 2007 he voted against the final version of the Iraq war supplemental which lacked any troop withdrawal language.

In November 2007, Obama voted in FAVOR of cloture on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill that would have set a goal of December 15, 2008 for the redeployment of U.S. combat troops from Iraq. This measure would have provided an additional \$50 billion for the Iraq – Afghanistan war. He voted AGAINST cloture on the alternative spending bill submitted by Senator McConnell which would have provided the funds but without any timetable for withdrawal (this vote prevented the McConnell bill from coming to a vote in the Senate).

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In June 2006, Obama voted AGAINST a measure that required the redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq begin during 2006 and be completed by July 1, 2007. He voted in FAVOR of an alternative measure that the President should submit to Congress by the end of 2006 a plan for the phased redeployment of troops from Iraq, but without Congress setting any timetable for withdrawal (Obama was a co-sponsor of the alternative).

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Also in September 2007, Senator Obama voted in FAVOR of the Levin – Reed Amendment that required that redeployment of U.S. forces begin within 90 days and that transition to a different mission be completed within 9 months (or June 2008). The new mission would include: “(1) Protecting United States and Coalition personnel and infrastructure. (2) Training, equipping, and providing logistic support to the Iraqi Security Forces. (3) Engaging in targeted counter terrorism operations against al Qaeda, al Qaeda affiliated groups, and other international terrorist organizations.”

In addition to key differences in the mission for remaining U.S. military forces, the Levin – Reed amendment did not contain a provision for ending military expenditures in Iraq after June 30, 2008.

In January 2007, Senator Obama introduced a Senate bill, “The Iraq War De-Escalation Act of 2007”. This bill required that phased redeployment begin no later than May 1, 2007 and set the goal of complete redeployment of all U.S. combat brigades from Iraq by March 31, 2008. The bill provides that U.S. troops would remain in Iraq for the following purposes: “(a) to protect United States personnel and facilities in Iraq; (b) to conduct targeted counter-terrorism operations; (c) to provide training for Iraqi security forces; (d) to conduct the routine functions of the Office of Defense Attache.”

Obama’s campaign position paper on Iraq states that he would immediately begin the redeployment of U.S. combat brigades from Iraq at the rate of 1 to 2 combat brigades per month, with the goal of completing the redeployment by the end of 2008. (see <http://my.barackobama.com/page/-/pdf/Fact%20Sheet%20Iraq%20Final.pdf>)

Obama does not define how many U.S. troops would potentially remain in Iraq under the exceptions that he carves out. Since his language is similar to that passed by the House of Representatives in March 2007 (as part of an Iraq war supplemental spending bill), his plan could potentially leave as many as 40,000 to 60,000 troops in Iraq, even after the phased redeployment is completed.

John Edwards

As Senator in 2002, John Edwards voted in favor of the authorization to go to war against Iraq. He voted in favor of Iraq war spending in April 2003. Edwards left the Senate following the 2004 election.

Edwards' campaign position paper states that he would immediately withdraw 40,000 to 50,000 troops. It states he would complete the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq within 9 to 10 months. Edwards would leave "...a brigade of 3,500 to 5,000 troops to protect the embassy and possibly a few hundred troops to guard humanitarian workers." (see <http://johnedwards.com/issues/iraq/>)

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Governor Bill Richardson

Governor Richardson calls for the complete withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq, with no residual force remaining in Iraq. He states that he would immediately begin such a withdrawal and states that “Logistically it would be possible to withdraw in six to eight months.” (see <http://www.richardsonforpresident.com/issues/iraq?id=0005>)

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Senator Joe Biden

Senator Biden voted for the 2002 authorization to go to war against Iraq. He voted for each Iraq war funding bill in 2003, 2005 and 2006. In May 2007 Senator Biden voted in FAVOR of the final version of the Iraq war supplemental that did not contain any troop withdrawal language. He was the only Democratic Senator currently running for President who voted in favor of the May 2007 Iraq war spending measure without it including any timetable for partial redeployment from Iraq.

In November 2007, Biden voted in FAVOR of cloture on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill that would have set a goal of December 15, 2008 for the redeployment of U.S. combat troops from Iraq. This measure would have provided an additional \$50 billion for the Iraq – Afghanistan war. He voted AGAINST cloture on the alternative spending bill submitted by Senator McConnell which would have provided the funds but without any timetable for withdrawal (this vote prevented the McConnell bill from coming to a vote in the Senate).

In May 2006, Biden voted in favor of cloture—a motion to end debate and bring an issue to a vote—on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill. At the time of this vote, an amendment by Senator Feingold to set a timetable for withdrawal was pending on the Senate floor. By voting for cloture Senator Biden voted to prevent this amendment from being voted upon.

In June 2006, Biden voted AGAINST a measure that required the redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq begin during 2006 and be completed by July 1, 2007. He voted in FAVOR of an alternative measure that the President should submit to Congress by the end of 2006 a plan for the phased redeployment of troops from Iraq, but without Congress setting any timetable for withdrawal (Biden was a co-sponsor).

In September 2007, Biden DID NOT VOTE on a Feingold sponsored measure which required the U.S. to begin redeploying troops from Iraq within 90 days and prohibited the expenditure of funds after June 30, 2008 except for the following purposes: “(1) To conduct targeted operations, limited in duration and scope, against members of al Qaeda and affiliated international terrorist organizations. (2) To provide security for United States Government personnel and infrastructure. (3) To provide training to members of the Iraqi Security Forces who have not been involved in sectarian violence or in attacks upon the United States Armed Forces, provided that such training does not involve members of the United States Armed Forces taking part in combat operations or being embedded with Iraqi forces. (4) To provide training, equipment, or other materiel to members of the United States Armed Forces to ensure, maintain, or improve their safety and security.”

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In September 2007, Senator Biden voted in FAVOR of the Levin – Reed Amendment that required that redeployment of U.S. forces begin within 90 days and that transition to a different mission be completed within 9 months (or June 2008). The new mission would include: “(1) Protecting United States and Coalition personnel and infrastructure. (2) Training, equipping, and providing logistic support to the Iraqi Security Forces. (3) Engaging in targeted counter terrorism operations against al Qaeda, al Qaeda affiliated groups, and other international terrorist organizations.”

In addition to key differences in the mission for remaining U.S. military forces, the Levin – Reed amendment did not contain a provision for ending military expenditures in Iraq after June 30, 2008.

Senator Biden states in his plan “Iraq: A Way Forward”—first announced in 2006—that the U.S. should withdraw most military forces from Iraq by the summer of 2008 and “Maintain in or near Iraq a small residual force -- perhaps 20,000 troops -- to strike any concentration of terrorists, help keep Iraq's neighbors honest and train its security forces.”

However, the provisions in the Levin – Reed amendment would likely mean that 40,000 to 60,000 U.S. troops would remain in Iraq after a redeployment and transition to a new mission in Iraq.

Senator Chris Dodd

Senator Dodd voted for the 2002 authorization to go to war against Iraq. He voted for each Iraq war funding bill in 2003, 2005 and 2006. In April 2007, he voted in favor of the Iraq war funding bill that required that U.S. troops begin to be withdrawn from Iraq, though lacking a firm deadline for completion of withdrawal. In May 2007, he voted against the final version of the Iraq war supplemental which lacked any troop withdrawal language. Indeed, in May 2007 Senator Dodd publicly announced the day before the vote on the Iraq war spending measure that he intended to vote against it.

In November 2007, Dodd voted in FAVOR of cloture on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill that would have set a goal of December 15, 2008 for the redeployment of U.S. combat troops from Iraq. This measure would have provided an additional \$50 billion for the Iraq – Afghanistan war. He voted AGAINST cloture on the alternative spending bill submitted by Senator McConnell which would have provided the funds but without any timetable for withdrawal (this vote prevented the McConnell bill from coming to a vote in the Senate).

In May 2006, Senator Dodd voted in AGAINST cloture—a motion to end debate and bring an issue to a vote—on the Iraq war supplemental spending bill. At the time of this vote, an amendment by Senator Feingold to set a timetable for withdrawal was pending on the Senate floor. By voting AGAINST cloture Senator Dodd voted to allow debate to continue which would have allowed for a vote on this amendment.

In June 2006, Dodd voted AGAINST a measure that required the redeployment of U.S. forces in Iraq begin during 2006 and be completed by July 1, 2007. He voted in FAVOR of an alternative measure that the President should submit to Congress by the end of 2006 a plan for the phased redeployment of troops from Iraq, but without Congress setting any timetable for withdrawal (Clinton was a co-sponsor of the alternative).

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In addition to key differences in the mission for remaining U.S. military forces, the Levin – Reed amendment did not contain a provision for ending military expenditures in Iraq after June 30, 2008.

Senator Dodd stated that he voted AGAINST the Levin – Reed Amendment in September 2007 because “I believe the only way to achieve real change in Iraq is to insist on a firm and enforceable deadline for redeploying U.S. combat troops that is tied to funding which is the only way we can end this war.”

The provisions of the Feingold Amendment, which Senator Dodd supported, could still leave 40,000 to 60,000 troops in Iraq for the indefinite future.

Representative Dennis Kucinich

Representative Kucinich voted against the 2002 authorization to go to war against Iraq. He has voted against every Iraq war supplemental spending bill that has come before Congress.

Representative Kucinich is the sponsor of House Resolution 1234 which states that: "Not later than the end of the 3-month period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, all United States Armed Forces serving in Iraq shall be completely withdrawn from Iraq and returned to the United States or redeployed outside of the Middle East." (see <http://www.dennis4president.com/home/>)

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Mike Gravel

Mike Gravel opposed the Iraq war prior to its start. He calls for the U.S. to “commence an immediate and orderly withdrawal of all U.S. troops that will have them home within 120 days”. (see <http://www.gravel2008.us/issues>)

One of Gravel’s most notable actions was to enter the Pentagon Papers into the Congressional Record in 1971. He also filibustered against the draft in the early 1970’s.

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