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Compromise needed

Now that President Bush has vetoed the Iraq war spending bill with its deadline for troop removal, and Congress has failed to override the veto, politicians are where they knew they would be - right back where they started.

They still need to find a way to fund the war effort, and they need a mechanism to achieve compromise on the direction of the war to make that funding possible. Bush isn't willing to be limited by a deadline for withdrawal, and Democrats aren't willing to give the president their approval to conduct the war as he sees fit.

Some hard-line Democrats in Congress are urging their colleagues to pass another bill with a deadline for removing troops from Iraq, continuing to force the issue on the president. That would be another waste of time.

There will be plenty of opportunities between now and next year's elections to score partisan points. While there are U.S. soldiers in danger, it's time to find a more sensible way forward.

Congress might be able to find the seeds of that compromise in the ideas being pushed by Congressman Bob Inglis. He wants to set benchmarks that measure the progress of the Iraqi government in taking over its obligations and building stability there.

Inglis wants to see a law fairly distributing Iraq's oil revenues among the different ethnic populations in the country. He wants to see them taking more responsibility for security. He wants constitutional guarantees of rights for minorities. If those benchmarks aren't met, he envisions withdrawal of U.S. nonmilitary aid, such as refusing to build planned water treatment plants.

A system of such benchmarks wouldn't be as restrictive as the deadline for withdrawing troops set by Democrats in the bill Bush vetoed, but it would allow Democrats to put some limits on U.S. involvement there.

White House and congressional negotiators must come up with some sort of similar compromise in order to move ahead. American soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen are in peril, and they need a war funding bill to give them the support and equipment they need.

They also need a less bitterly divided government to back them up - a government made up of leaders clearly more interested in bringing about a disaster-free conclusion to this conflict than in setting their party up for the next election.



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