

## **Let Americans and Iraqis Vote Directly on Ending the War: A Strategy for Turning Majority Support for Troop Withdrawal into a Mandate for Peace**

Six out of ten Americans believe that all U.S. troops should come home from Iraq within one year. Yet the war has not been stopped. Despite a mandate from the 2006 elections for withdrawal, Congress has been unable to end the war. John McCain has made endless war the centerpiece of his campaign. And the Democratic presidential candidates still do not support what 60 percent of Americans, and more than 80 percent of Democrats, want--bringing all the troops home within one year.

The 2008 election has become a historic campaign for change from the failed policies of the Bush administration, including for an end to the war. However, the historical record, including recent history, warns us to be cautious about relying on promises to end a war, and certainly skeptical about ending it sooner rather than later and completely rather than partially. Electing a pro-peace majority in Congress and a pro-peace president is necessary to end the war but it is not sufficient. In addition, voters in the United States and in Iraq need to, and can, have a direct say on withdrawal, through ballot measures in the United States calling for a one-year withdrawal of all U.S. troops as well as a national referendum in Iraq on the U.S. occupation.

### **Suggested text of anti-war measures for state and local ballots**

*Shall the Congress and President of the United States end the U.S. occupation of Iraq and immediately begin the safe and orderly withdrawal of all U.S. troops and military bases, to be completed no later than November 4, 2009?*

*Shall the taxpayers' money being spent on the war in Iraq be used instead to care for our veterans, help reconstruct Iraq, help alleviate the budget crisis facing many states, and provide funding for unmet needs here at home?*

*Shall the U.S. government help end the war sooner and enable a safer withdrawal of U.S. troops by allowing Iraqis to vote in a national referendum in Iraq on whether U.S. troops and military bases should be withdrawn?*

Measures against the war can be placed on ballots in the November election by state legislatures in as many as twenty-seven states. There are fourteen states with a Democratic legislature and a Democratic governor: Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Washington, and West Virginia. In Connecticut, Hawaii, and Rhode Island, Democratic legislatures can override a Republican governor's veto, and in Minnesota and Vermont it would take an additional three or four Republican votes to do so. In eight states with Democratic governors, if Democratic support in the legislature is solid, a switch of two to five Republican votes would put these measures on the ballot: Delaware, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. As a necessary compromise to get measures on the ballots in those states, Republicans could offer voters a choice by putting their position on the war side by side with that of Democrats.

County and city ballot measures are possible in most of the other twenty-three states, put on by city councils and county boards of supervisors. There are three hundred cities and counties

whose governing bodies have passed resolutions opposing the Iraq War or calling for withdrawal. It is not too late to get measures on the ballot (the deadlines are as late as early August), and no petition signatures will be required. If widespread enough, they can create a grassroots national referendum for peace.

There is a simple way to get measures on the ballot in the time required. First, by going to city and state governments that have supported or are likely to support withdrawal and asking them to put it on the ballot. Second, by making the antiwar measures one of three advisory votes on the key issues in the election according to voters: the economy, the war, and health care.

Ballot measures will not only be important in themselves to help create a mandate to end the war, but, if widespread enough, they will help accomplish the other goal needed to do so: electing a pro-peace majority in Congress and a pro-peace president. They will force the presidential and congressional candidates, Democrats and Republicans, to choose between a real peace or continued war, helping defeat those who choose war. They will help strengthen the withdrawal positions of Democratic candidates, committing them to do what the majority of Americans want. They can help turn John McCain's support for ongoing war from the centerpiece of his campaign into a key reason for his defeat. Ballot measures can affect the results of as many as two-thirds of the key House and Senate races. Moreover, if they are widespread enough, they can help elect a Democratic majority in Congress that is large enough to pass progressive legislation of all kinds.

This campaign can succeed because a strategy of direct democracy for peace has worked before. The 1982 nuclear freeze initiatives, which called for a halt to the nuclear arms race, were approved in nine states and more than fifty cities, involving 30 percent of the American people, catalyzing a powerful movement that helped end the Cold War and the nuclear arms race.

We also can support the Iraqi people in voting in a national referendum there to end the U.S. occupation. With at least two thirds of Iraqis wanting all U.S. troops withdrawn within a year or less, Iraqis will vote to end the U.S. occupation. This would clear the way for the Iraqi government to negotiate the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

A referendum in Iraq will greatly increase support for withdrawal in the United States. In a little-noticed poll (Program on International Policy Attitudes, November 2006) two-thirds of Republicans said they would support a one-year withdrawal of all U.S. troops if the Iraqi people ask us to do so. In other words, Republicans switch from almost two-thirds support for the war to two-thirds support for withdrawal. Support for withdrawal among Democrats and independents increased by more than 20 percent under these conditions. Because of this increased support, withdrawal will happen sooner rather than later, and completely rather than partially.

What stands in the way of more Americans supporting withdrawal, and of more Democrats supporting one-year withdrawal, are the fears, promoted by Republicans, that withdrawal will be a victory for terrorists and will lead to greater violence in Iraq. Because the United States will have been voted out of Iraq, not driven out by violence, as a result of a referendum there, those claims cannot be plausibly made.

A U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in response to such a democratic vote will be a major step toward peace and reconciliation in Iraq. By providing a democratic alternative to violence, it will greatly reduce support for terrorist groups and the threat of terrorism against the United States, and make troop withdrawal safer. If widespread anti-war ballot measures are approved in the United States, and the Iraqi people support withdrawal in a national referendum there, this will be the first time that the people of an occupied country and the people of the occupying power will have voted together to end a war.