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## Baseless In Baghdad

Joe Volk

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*Joe Volk is the executive secretary of the [Friends Committee on National Legislation](#).*

**Last week** the United States took a small but important step toward a new direction for U.S. policy in Iraq. When Congress approved and President George Bush signed the military appropriation bills, they enacted a provision to bar the Pentagon from establishing permanent military bases in Iraq. The Pentagon is now prohibited by law from spending any money for fiscal year 2007 to establish permanent military bases in Iraq or attempt to take over the oil resources of Iraq. That is a new direction, but will the administration take direction from Congress?

The No Permanent Bases Provision, for the first time, makes a formal declaration of policy that the U.S. will not permanently occupy Iraq. Until now, the president and his advisors have offered mixed messages about if and when U.S. military forces will withdraw from Iraq. Those mixed messages created the perception that the U.S. plans to stay. Adding to this perception, the U.S. continues to build military facilities that cost and look a lot like [permanent military bases](#).

Until now, the failure of U.S. policymakers to state unequivocally that the U.S. will not maintain a permanent presence in Iraq has fueled the violent conflict and contributed to the slide toward civil war in Iraq. Several recent opinion surveys of Iraqis—including one by the Department of State—show that strong majorities now see U.S. military forces as a major problem in Iraq, not as a part of the solution. An opinion poll released in September by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes found that nearly 4 in 5 Iraqis believe that the U.S. presence in their country is feeding rather than containing sectarian violence. Seventy-seven percent of Iraqis believe the United States plans to establish permanent bases, and 61 percent approve of attacks on U.S. forces.

Here at the [Friends Committee on National Legislation](#), we have been working with people around the country for the last 18 months to persuade Congress to pass a simple declaration of policy that the United States government intends to withdraw all U.S. military troops and bases from Iraq. And members of Congress from both parties are beginning to listen to the evidence and to recognize that the U.S. is part of the problem, not the solution in Iraq. The Senate attached a provision barring permanent bases to an emergency supplemental funding bill earlier this year, but we are told that the Pentagon successfully lobbied to have that provision removed from the legislation in a conference committee. The belief among Iraqis that the Pentagon lobbied against this language added to fears that the U.S. does plan to establish permanent bases in Iraq and, of course, is fueling Iraqi suspicions.

But members of Congress didn't give up. Both the House and the Senate approved language that explicitly prohibits the Pentagon from spending next fiscal year's funds to establish a military basing agreement in Iraq or to exercise control over Iraqi oil. Only a bipartisan consensus on this point could have resulted in this legislative outcome. The No Permanent Military Bases Provision may presage a new direction in the 110th Congress, if not in the lame duck session this year. President Bush signed the military spending legislation into law on September 29, effectively barring the Pentagon from spending any money appropriated for fiscal year 2007 to negotiate a permanent bases agreement in Iraq.

This legislation by itself will not result in a major policy shift on the war in Iraq—the same military appropriations bill also designates \$70 billion for funding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the

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Bush administration continues to promote its "stay the course" ideology. But Congress's decision to block military installations is an important statement that sorely needs to be heard.

Now the challenge is to ensure that Congress takes the next logical step by establishing a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Senator John Warner, the chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, suggested in early October that the U.S. may need to develop a new strategy in Iraq if the situation on the ground doesn't change in the next 60 to 90 days, and members of both major political parties are discussing new directions for policy.

The next month could be a pivotal moment in this debate. The Congressional election campaigns of November 2006 provide a perfect time to question members of Congress about the war in Iraq. U.S. policy in Iraq is not ending the violence or giving authority to representative Iraqi leaders. The Arab League, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and, according to opinion polls, a majority of Iraqis want a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Since "staying the course" in Iraq has not led to greater security, will members of Congress exercise the courage to establish a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops? Or will Congress hide behind the administration while more U.S. military personnel risk their lives and while Iraqis lose all safety and security to a made-in-the-U.S.A. civil war?