

The Money Behind the “Surge”

By Aaron Glantz | February 5, 2007

While an increasing number of Democratic and Republican legislators oppose the Bush administration's plan to “surge” the number of troops in Iraq, their efforts remain largely symbolic, limited to making public declarations and passing non-binding resolutions. Anti-war activists, on the other hand, are searching for ways to cut off the money needed to sustain the war.

“Two years ago, it seemed pretty lonely. Now every politician wants to be seen on television saying something bad about President [George W.] Bush's handling of the war,” says Rusti Eisenstadt, an activist and professor of U.S. history at Hofstra University. “The key now is to get [Congress] to do something instead of hiding behind non-binding resolutions.”

Activists are setting their sights on a request Bush is expected to submit to Congress this week for an estimated \$100 billion more for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Peace groups would like to see Congress vote against that measure, a move they see as more important than any progressive piece of legislation introduced in Congress this year.

“We are looking at a lot of things that are happening in the Congress right now, from a Senate resolution that opposes an escalation [sending more troops to Iraq] but will allow a war to continue, to other bills out there that talk about bringing the troops home and defunding the war, but which George Bush can veto,” said Nancy Lessing of the group Military Families Speak Out.

“The one thing that we see that can end this war is if Congress votes no money on the appropriation that's going to come before them,” she added.

“Legislation is so that Congress has cover,” added Michael McPherson, executive director of Veterans for Peace. “The bottom line is that we want the

troops to come home and we need it to be defunded. All the other stuff is just a game.”

Previous votes have been extremely lopsided, with the vast majority of the House and almost every member of the Senate supporting continued funding. Already, Congress has approved more than \$380 billion for the war in Iraq, according to a report from the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a nonprofit think tank specializing in issues of peace, justice, and the environment. The IPS calculates that if that money had not been spent on the war, it could have been used to build 2.9 million units of affordable housing in the United States or paid for 62 million scholarships to university students.

Activists take some solace, however, in the fact that the Democrats' good showing at the polls in November 2006 means that Rep. John Murtha (D-PA) now chairs a key House of Representatives committee that must approve the president's request.

Murtha, a decorated Marine Corps veteran with close ties to the military establishment, shocked many in Washington last year when he came out for a “redeployment” of U.S. troops from Iraq and said the presence of U.S. soldiers there has increased the level of violence in Iraq rather than calmed it.

At a press conference last week, Murtha said he would not approve the latest request for \$100 billion in war funding without “extensive hearings” that are slated to begin February 17. “We're going

RIGHT WEB

exposing the architecture of power that's changing our world

to check every cent that is spent by the United States government,” Murtha said.

Analysts expect Murtha to eventually vote to approve the war funding but with conditions attached.

At a hearing of the Congressional Progressive Caucus in January, Murtha said those conditions could include that no money be allocated for an escalation unless the military can meet normal “readiness” levels.

“We should not spend money to send people overseas unless they replenish the strategic reserve,” Murtha told that hearing. “If he wants to veto the bill,” Murtha said of Bush, “he won’t have any money.”

Former Rep. Tom Andrews (D-ME), who is close to Murtha, told the Inter Press Service that other conditions for further funding of the Iraq War could include closing the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and bulldozing the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Eisenstadt of Hofstra believes any increase in members of Congress voting against funding the war will make an impact.

“People forget that Congress did not vote to stop funding the war in Vietnam until after all the American troops had already left,” Eisenstadt said. “Instead what happened was that every year more and more members of Congress voted against the war and that pressured President Richard Nixon to pull more and more troops out every year.

“When President Nixon took office, there were half a million U.S. troops in Vietnam,” she said. “By the end of his first term it was down to 35,000.”

Aaron Glantz is a contributor to the Inter Press Service.

Published by the Right Web of the International Relations Center (IRC, online at www.irc-online.org). ©Creative Commons - some rights reserved.

The Right Web

“Exposing the architecture of power that’s changing our world”

Recommended citation:

Aaron Glantz, “The Money Behind the ‘Surge’,” Right Web Analysis (Silver City, NM: International Relations Center, February 5, 2007).

Web location:

<http://rightweb.irc-online.org/rw/3967>

Production Information:

Writer: Aaron Glantz

Editor: Right Web

Layout: Chellee Chase-Saiz, IRC