

Iraqi MPs Push for US Withdrawal

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A majority of the Iraqi parliament has written to Congress rejecting a long-term security deal with Washington if it is not linked to a requirement that US forces leave, a US lawmaker has said. Rep. William Delahunt, a Massachusetts Democrat and Iraq war opponent, released excerpts from a letter he was handed by Iraqi parliamentarians laying down conditions for the security pact that the Bush administration seeks with Iraq.

The proposed pact has become increasingly controversial in Iraq, where there have been protests against it. It has also drawn criticism from Democrats on the presidential election campaign trail in the US, who say President George W. Bush is trying to dictate war policy after he leaves office. The letter to the leaders of Congress read: "The majority of Iraqi representatives strongly reject any military-security, economic, commercial, agricultural, investment or political agreement with the United States that is not linked to clear mechanisms that obligate the occupying American military forces to fully withdraw from Iraq."

Delahunt, a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee chairman said the signatures represented just over half the membership of Iraq's parliament.

Two Iraqi lawmakers whose parties were listed as signatories testified to Delahunt's panel on Wednesday that US troops should leave Iraq, and that talks on the long-term security pact should be postponed until after they are gone.

Nadeem Al-Jaberi, a co-founder of the al-Fadhila political party, asked: "What are the threats that require US forces to be there?" "I would like to inform you, there are no threats on Iraq. We are capable of solving our own problems," he declared. He favored a quick pullout of US forces, which invaded the country in 2003 and currently number around 155,000.

Khalaf Al-Ulayyan, founder of the National Dialogue Council, said bilateral talks on a long-term security deal should be shelved until American troops leave — and until there is a new government in Washington. "We prefer to delay until there is a new administration in the United States," he said.

A senior US official said in Baghdad earlier this week that the US still hopes to reach a new security agreement with Iraq by July, even though officials in the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki say negotiations are at an early stage.

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