

# WebMemo



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## Deployment Length Amendment Is First Step Toward “Cut and Run” In Iraq

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Senator Jim Webb (D–VA) recently introduced an amendment (S. 2001) to the fiscal year 2008 defense authorization bill to mandate individual soldier and unit deployment lengths. The amendment prohibits the deployment of any soldiers, sailors, airmen, or Marines to Iraq or Afghanistan unless their time at home is equal to or longer than the time that they have served overseas. The amendment also prohibits the deployment of any unit or member of a Reserve component (including the National Guard) that has been deployed at any time within the last three years. This proposal is a transparent attempt to hamstring the military’s ability to support combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—the first step toward cutting and running in Iraq and turning the country over to al-Qaeda, Iran, and other terrorists groups that want to kill, exploit, and oppress the Iraqi people. The Senate should reject the cut-and-run approach.

### **Undermining How Democracies Fight Wars.**

The greatest flaw in the Webb amendment is that it would undermine how America fights wars. If Members of Congress sitting in air-conditioned offices thousands of miles from the battlefield begin to dictate how wars are fought, democracy will be in danger. When legislation undermines the President’s constitutional authority as Commander in Chief, the United States loses the ability to marshal its power in times of war. Any precedents that undermine the power of the current President could also hamstring future Presidents.

Proposals to limit troop use are also unrealistic. Armies rarely go into battle with all the equipment,

people, and preparation they need. With such standards in place, Americans would never have fought at Trenton, Cantigny, the Battle of the Bulge, or the Chosin Reservoir. No army could fight and win with these kinds of restrictions. In addition, legislative delays on committing troops would put the soldiers already on the ground at far greater risk. Even a proposal that allows the President to waive such restrictions for military necessity would be risky. Waiver criteria would be controversial, using waivers would leave the President open to criticism, and delays in obtaining waivers could cost lives.

The Webb amendment provides a so-called waiver only in the event of an “operational emergency posing a vital threat to national security interests.” In order to grant a waiver, the President would have to certify to Congress that the deployment of the unit or member is necessary. The term “necessary” is not defined; therefore, the amendment leaves open to debate when the Commander in Chief should have the flexibility to determine what is necessary for the U.S. military. For these reasons, the amendment would undermine the Commander in Chief’s capacity to defend the nation.

**Let the Pentagon Do Its Job.** While multiple tours are now normal for ground combat units, the

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goal of “taking better care of the troops” is not achieved by legislating limitations on combatant commanders, service chiefs, and the Secretary of Defense.

Indeed, current Army policy already provides no less than one year at home for soldiers deployed for 15 months. And for each month beyond a year spent by soldiers in combat, they are paid an additional \$1,000 per month or receive additional time off. (Active-duty soldiers receive one day off for every month their deployment extends beyond 12 months in a three-year period. If deployment extends to more than 18 months out of 36, two days per month are granted.) The Defense Department’s current policy for members of the Reserve Component is one year deployed and five years stateside unless the soldier volunteers for repeat tours. Active-duty Marines are sent on seven-month combat tours, with six months at home between deployments.

Acting Army Secretary Pete Geren testified before Congress in June that the Army is constantly reviewing options to relieve pressure on active-duty soldiers, such as relying more heavily on reservists and using sister services for help. Though there is no doubt that America is asking much of its ground forces, an Associated Press article in June analyzed Pentagon figures and found that 45 percent of Marines and 37 percent of Army soldiers had never been deployed for various reasons, such as their skill sets and current locations overseas. These numbers do not justify Congress legislating operational deployment decisions that really should be determined based upon the needs of battlefield commanders.

If the Webb amendment were to become law, it could actually achieve the opposite effect, with soldiers going overseas sooner than the Pentagon planned to send them. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told reporters in April that if the military had not made 15 months the standard tour length in place of 12 months, he would have been forced to send five active duty Army brigades to Iraq before they completed their year at home. The Secretary said he thinks it is fair for all soldiers to share the burden equally.

Secretary Gates has also repeatedly said that 15-month deployments are the worst-case scenario and that the Department will eventually return to a 12-month deployment schedule, with two years at home between deployments. The recent decision to extend some tours by three months allows military leaders to lengthen the time between rotations and reduce the number of troops they need in the pipeline, thereby lowering the pace of deployments and relieving pressure on the force.

**Conclusion.** Legislating combat deployment schedules would limit the Commander in Chief’s flexibility during war and would be the first step toward cutting and running in Iraq. The Department of Defense is taking adequate steps to address extended deployments, and interference from Congress could result in even longer deployments for some troops. Congress should not be in the business of dictating troop deployment policies.

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