

**Priorities for the 110th Congress**  
**Short Essays**  
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## **Curbing Weapons Proliferation and Preventing War**

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The advent of new leadership in Congress opens up a wide range of possibilities for significant changes in U.S. security policy. In the past few years, the bulk of Congressional concern and public discussion on security matters has focused on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and rightly so. But support for measures to curb the international arms trade may be the most important initiative the United States can take to prevent future Iraqs and Afghanistans. Three major steps to curb the arms trade are as follows:

1. Support development of an arms trade treaty: In a recent UN vote to discuss and study the prospects for a treaty that would limit arms transfers to dictators and human rights abusers, the United States was the only nation to vote "no." A "sense of Congress" resolution supporting such a treaty \* accompanied by substantive hearings -- would be an important first step towards shifting the debate in the United States.
- ii. Provide funding to destroy surplus stockpiles of small arms and light weapons: Senators Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Barack Obama (D-IL) have co-sponsored a bill to create a program that would provide resources to destroy major stockpiles of small arms and light weapons. Since many of the arms used in the world's most devastating conflicts come from arms dealers who buy and sell these surplus armaments, this program would be an important step towards preventing future conflicts, or at least providing political space to resolve them before they spiral out of control.
- iii. Ratify the Organization of American States' Firearms Protocol: This initiative would establish common standards for regulating the transfer of small arms in the Western Hemisphere. Since arms traffickers frequently exploit the loopholes provided by differing national laws on this issue, implementing a common approach would help stem illicit sales.

## **Real Debates, Real Information, Real Oversight**

*Winslow Wheeler, Director, Straus Military Reform Project, Center for Defense Information*

- The Congressional Record, the official transcript of the proceedings of the House and Senate, should be an accurate record of what actually transpires. Today, it is no such thing. Members and their staff alter the transcript of the proceedings every day. An accurate transcript would mean the prohibition of the practice of inserting written, undelivered speeches into the Congressional Record “as if read,” and it would ban staff from editing – often heavily – the transcript of members’ remarks before they are printed.
- The TV cameras – C-SPAN -- in the House and Senate chambers should give voters a live, real-time picture of what is actually and truly occurring in the national legislature. In a functional democracy that is invaluable. Unfortunately, the House and Senate require the camera to be up tight on whoever is speaking thus distorting what is truly going on. The televised images show nothing of the almost empty chambers, the disinterested members, the un-listening chatterers. Were C-SPAN to scan their cameras, then it is conceivable that members of Congress might actually stumble into one of the reasons they have been elected – to debate and discuss legislation.

### **An Informed Debate?**

Members of Congress need to be confronted with better information in order to make informed policy decisions. “Confronted” is the correct term; the information should be provided to them whether they want it or not. National security information on Capitol Hill, more specifically the staff that generates it, should be a model for other subject areas, as follows:

Staff members should have demonstrated competence not just in the subject area assigned to them, but also formal training or demonstrated experience in evaluation, auditing, or investigations.

The professional staff should work for members on both sides of the aisle. They should be hired and fired only by a joint decision of both the senior Democrat and Republican on committees. All staff should also be afforded “whistleblower” protection, which they are now specifically denied.

The staff’s memoranda on substantive issues should be public documents, when they are not by necessity classified. In all cases, their memoranda should be distributed to all members in the House and Senate.

## **Close the Revolving Door**

A major cause of poor analysis on Capitol Hill is the revolving door, specifically at the staff level. Human nature is too frail to permit any defense manufacturer or the Pentagon itself to dangle the prospect of future employment before, during, or after a staffer provides analysis of the pros and cons of prospective multibillion dollar defense contracts. To keep things simple, staffers should be prohibited from taking any job with the Department of Defense or any defense manufacturer for at least five years after they leave Capitol Hill.

## **Conduct a Little Oversight**

With competent staff memoranda distributed to all members, Congress would be under some public and intra-mural pressure to probe the issues deeper, such as by posing informed – not rhetorical – questions in debates and oversight hearings. Indeed, competent memoranda will comprise a form of oversight in themselves.

Strangely enough, one of the best areas for Congress to reintroduce itself to oversight is pork. The congressional defense committees should apply the following procedures for any earmark any member wants to add to any defense bill:

Obtain an estimate of the actual cost of the proposal from a truly independent entity, such as the Congressional Budget Office.

Get an evaluation by the Government Accountability Office, or another entity with no financial relationship with the Pentagon or defense contractors, on the need for and effectiveness of the proposed program.

For any earmark that makes it through the legislative process, require a complete and open nation-wide contract competition for the program, rather than give it to a pre-selected contractor in a pre-selected location.

Many in Congress will oppose these suggestions. They would, however, apply the same ideas that many in Congress seek to apply to Defense Department procurement. What is good governance in the Pentagon would also be good for Congress.

## Get Serious About Climate Change and Global Warming

*Charles Knight, Co-Director, Project on Defense Alternatives*

The single most important national security initiative the new Congress should take in its first 180 days is to set in motion a serious response to the threat of global warming.

It is hard to imagine a much greater national interest than taking domestic and international action to slow and reverse the climate change path we are on. Congress must take the lead in moving the U.S. from its current position as an irresponsible naysayer to being a responsible leader in reversing the destructive course we are on. In comparison, a 'war on terrorism' pales in significance.

The Center for American Progress recently summarized the situation as follows:

"The United States is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, responsible for 25 percent of global emissions. According to a new study released by Climate Action Network Europe at the Nairobi conference, the United States ranks 53rd in climate change performance of the 56 top carbon dioxide-emitting nations. Bush has contended that the Kyoto Protocol would be too expensive to implement and continues to shirk his campaign commitment to regulate carbon dioxide emissions. 'If the USA, currently among the bottom five, were to exercise an international climate policy stance as progressive as the UK, it would move up more than 30 places,' notes the Climate Action study, 'but because of their adverse position in national and international climate policies the United States blows this chance.' Annual federal spending for research energy and development has fallen from an inflation-adjusted peak of \$7.7 billion in 1979 to just \$3 billion in the current budget. Bush has 'sought an increase to \$4.2 billion for 2007, but that would still be a small fraction of what most climate and energy experts say would be needed.' In contrast, funding for military research has increased 260 percent and is now at more than \$75 billion a year."

Famously, a few years ago the Pentagon did a scenario study of security threats associated with global warming. Apparently the study took a passive stance in regards to the path to global warming, focusing instead on limiting the direct effects on the US of the social chaos caused by global warming. The reason for this approach in the Pentagon study is not hard to discern. Appropriate responses to environmental degradation have hardly anything to do with the military instrument. The Pentagon is itself a significant contributing factor to global warming (it has a huge 'environmental footprint') and its tools are basically irrelevant to the prevention of this security threat. In its scenario it could imagine a role only after the fact.

Dealing effectively with this growing threat will require other agencies of government crafting domestic and international economic regulation of CO2 emissions and making investments in new technologies of energy production and transport. It would be a mistake in principle to give much of this business to military organizations.

Arguably part of the reason climate change is not getting the attention it deserves is because we are living in an over-militarized nation state. As long as the Pentagon is the preeminent government institution of national policy, we can not expect that countering environmental degradation will be given high or highest ranking in the priorities of

national security strategy. And rebalancing in favor the Department of State does not solve this either – State’s role is too narrow. For now it will be up to Congress through its budgetary influence to refocus numerous federal agencies on this threat and to pressure the Administration to provide effective coordination of efforts.

## **Paying for War**

*Anita Dancs, Research Director, National Priorities Project*

The U.S. needs to withdraw from Iraq as a first step toward ending the bloodshed. But it's also critical that Congress get serious about a critical and related issue: how we pay for war?

Americans have realized – perhaps belatedly – that the cost of this war in treasure and blood just has not made sense. But we have yet to really pay the financial costs. The war is essentially deficit-financed, meaning not only do we still have to pay the cost, but the interest payments as well. The administration and Congress, in all likelihood, are going to be tempted to do more of what's happening right now: using the high cost of war as an excuse to cut investment in infrastructure, reduce access to health care, and so on. But debate over other government expenditures – the non-military spending – should be completely separate from the debate over how to pay for the war. There should not be a trade-off between war spending and the quality of life at home.

Yet, we still need to pay for the war and pushing the cost onto our children through deficits and an increasing national debt is neither sensible nor fair. We need to bring in sufficient revenues to pay the bills. After all, the deficits were caused by a completely unprecedented move: giving tax breaks to the wealthy at the same time as waging wars.

In the coming months, Congress can address the cost of the war by:

- rolling back the two top tax rates to the level prior to 2001 (pre-EGGTRA);
- reverting the capital gains back to 8, 10, 18 and 20 percent;
- ending the preferential treatment of dividends

The Tax Policy Center estimates that these policy changes together would generate more than \$50 billion in the next calendar year. While that isn't enough to even pay for one year of the Iraq War, it is a healthy start to get us out of the hole we're in budget-wise.