

## The War in Iraq, Post-Election

By Amy E. Wong



After an election with the largest poll turn-out in the last 50 years, one thing has become crystal clear: Americans are dissatisfied with the war in Iraq. Democrats won control of Congress, with outspoken war critics Bernard Sanders of Vermont, Sherrod Brown of Ohio, and James Webb of Virginia joining the Senate's fold. And, the day after the election, Donald Rumsfeld, who spearheaded the war, resigned from his post as Secretary of Defense and was replaced by Robert M. Gates.

Sweet victory.

The Iraq war is getting old, literally. It has dragged on for 44 long months and claimed a U.S. death toll of 2,844. 16 more Americans died last week. And, worst of all, no progress seems to have been made.

In interpreting the election results, it's hard to say whether Americans want to just end the war or continue it with an objective and deadline in mind. *Newsweek* offered an interesting insight, saying, "The 2006 vote does not suggest an eagerness for a sharp left turn. It seems, rather, to be a plea for a shift from the hard right of the neoconservatives to the center represented by the old man in Houston."

This makes sense. We all know that Bush does what Bush does—even if that means determinedly trampling over everybody. Bush only stops when there is something bigger and more dangerous looming before him, threatening to strip him of his power—basically Congressional check. Previously, with a Republican Congress and conservative Supreme Court judges, Bush had free reign to do as he pleased, which meant making extremely conservative decisions.

As suggested by *Newsweek*, the 2006 vote does not reflect a sharp left turn and does not even indicate that the majority of Americans advocate a sudden evacuation from Iraq. The vote shows what presidential popularity polls have been showing for the last few years: Bush and his war in Iraq are highly unpopular. The 2006 vote reflects a desire to move toward the political center and to only continue with the war with an objective and timeline in mind.

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I believe that there are a few points that support my contention:

1. Even though Bush was highly unpopular at the time of the 2004 election, America reelected Bush over Democrat John Kerry, who was advocating a withdrawal from Iraq. Americans didn't necessarily want a withdrawal; they wanted to ensure that the administration that instigated the war would responsibly conclude the war.
2. In the 2004 election, Kerry lost to Bush because he failed to obtain the votes of Colorado and Virginia. This time around, Virginia, known for its Republican populace, went to the Democrats. In fact, James Webb, an open war critic, beat out Senator George Allen by a hair. For a state that voted pro-war two years ago, this Democratic shift does not reflect a sudden rejection of the Iraq war but, rather, a rejection of how the Republicans are handling the war.
3. Lieberman beat out the more liberal Democratic candidate, Ned Lamont, in his Connecticut senate race. What's surprising about this is that the pro-war Lieberman won in an anti-war state. A week before the election, Lieberman remained firm regarding his opposition to the Democrats' call for withdrawal, saying, "What we are doing now there is not working, but that doesn't mean in any case that it is time for us to retreat." Upon his win, Lieberman said, "The voters spoke on Tuesday that they're unhappy with the status quo." However, he asserted, "I don't believe they want us to pick up and leave."

There is much ongoing analysis of the election results. Most political analysts concur that the Democrats' Congressional win does not signify that America has embraced Democratic ideology. Instead, they argue that it is simply a rejection of the Republicans' handling of the Iraq war. In any case, this landmark election will force both parties to resolve their differences and work towards a viable solution to address what's happening in Iraq. Republicans will have to reevaluate their previous stance on the war, and Democrats will have to avoid a messy repeat of the conclusion to the war in Vietnam.