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**To:** Friends of Democracy Corps

**From:** Stan Greenberg  
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**RE: IRAQ**

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With Iraq resolutions pending before the House and Senate, we wanted to provide Members of Congress and the progressive community guidance on this issue – regardless of whether they intend to support or oppose the resolution on the use of force in Iraq. We fully understand that votes like this come once in a decade or more, and Members will vote their conscience and their view of the country's interests. This memorandum should help Members – whether they oppose or support a resolution on force – present their positions effectively in a way that allows the election to move to domestic issues.

To be sure, the timing of the Iraq debate has helped the Republicans or at least put off the impact of the domestic issues that favor the Democrats. George W. Bush's job approval remains high at 67 percent and that has helped the Republicans maintain a somewhat higher standing than the Democrats. The pervasiveness of the Iraq issue tilts the playing field toward the Republicans, making it difficult to make gains now.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, a generic Democrat and a generic Republican run neck-and-neck, with the Democrat slightly ahead (46 to 44 percent), even in the midst of the Iraq debate. And voters still stay they intend to vote domestic issues on election day, with the war on terrorism tied for fourth in importance (20 percent), well behind the economy and jobs (37 percent), Social Security (23 percent), education (23 percent) and even with affordable health care (20 percent). Among voters that pick the four top voting issues, including the economy, Democrats win the congressional race by well over 20 points. (Voters who say the war on terrorism is their top issue vote Republican by 37 points, however, which mitigates the domestic impact for the moment.)

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<sup>1</sup> This memorandum uses a new national survey conducted by the Democracy Corps. The survey was fielded September 30 - October 2, 2002 and included 1008 likely voters.

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This decision will take place in a setting where voters, by 10 points, prefer to vote for a Member who supports a resolution to authorize force (50 to 40 percent).<sup>2</sup> In addition, we found that a Democrat supporting a resolution runs stronger than one opposing it. For half the respondents, we presented a Democratic candidate supporting the resolution. Among these voters, the generic congressional vote remained stable, with the Democrats still ahead by 2 points at the end of the survey. In the other half of the sample, we presented a Democrat opposed to the resolution. In this group, the Democratic congressional advantage slipped by 6 points at the end of the survey. When such an opponent to the resolution uses the strongest argument, we expect this slippage to be diminished.

There are three critical caveats to understanding the current environment:

1. ***An opponent of the Iraq resolution can run competitively with the Republican proponent, when he or she affirms support for the war on terrorism in general, and expresses reservations in that context.*** Focusing on costs or opposing regime changes in principle is less convincing for the public.
2. ***A Democratic supporter of an Iraq resolution is most compelling and strongly preferred to the Republican supporter when he or she gives strong voice to certain reservations about this operation – the need for allies who will share costs, concern about increased instability and neglect of the war on terrorism.*** A down-the-line supporter of the President in Iraq actually runs significantly weaker than the proponent with reservations. Indeed, in order to maintain Democratic morale, it is critical that Democratic supporters of this resolution be articulate about their reservations, as 34 percent of the Democrats in the country want to vote for a Democrat opposed to authorizing force.
3. ***While Democrats, particularly opponents, lose some ground in the context of the Iraq debate, Republican efforts to politicize the issue backfire – and indeed, wipe out all their gains.*** In the survey, we simulated this prospect by reading one-half the respondents a statement by Bush urging voters to support Republicans because of their support in this effort to overthrow Saddam Hussein and because of their support for a strong military to wage the war on terrorism. Yet that statement – rather than producing a gain for the Republicans – produces a 3-point swing *toward* the Democrats, compared to those respondents who hear no such attack. The Republicans, in short, could easily overplay their hand if they try to carry the Iraq period into the election campaign ahead.

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<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with the findings in the NPR survey, conducted September 17-22, 2002 by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner and Public Opinion Strategies. The Democracy Corps survey repeats the question developed for NPR and reported last week.

## Opposing the Resolution

As we mentioned above, an opponent of the war tends to lose ground in the survey, when compared to a proponent. But opponents have strong arguments on their side, as reflected in the responses below, and it is possible to be competitive with the Republicans on the issue.

The graph below lists the most convincing statements by the opponents in rank-order of strength. As one can see, 57 percent of the voters say they are much more or somewhat more likely to vote for a Democratic opponent of the resolution (including 38 percent who say much more likely) when they explain their vote. Strongest overall is a statement that affirms one's commitment to wage the war against terrorism, including getting rid of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, but that questions the rush to war; it calls on the US to seek UN and international support, others sharing costs and making sure we will achieve greater stability.

Nearly as strong is voting no "*for now*," and stressing the need to go to the UN, "try to get inspectors back into Iraq and work to get the support of our allies." That position is strongest by far with independents and with men (where the issue has more salience).

### Democratic Statements Opposing Resolution

	Much More Lkly	Much Smwt Lkly
I'm committed to waging the war against terrorism, including getting rid of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. But I am opposed to authorizing an attack on Iraq at this time. We should not rush into war without the support of the UN and our allies. I want to make sure we have international support, others countries sharing costs and a better chance of stability after any attack.	38	57
I'm opposed to authorizing an attack on Iraq now. I'm committed to waging the war on terrorism, but I want to make sure we go to the UN, try to get inspectors back into Iraq and that we work to get the support of our allies.	33	54
I'm opposed to authorizing an attack on Iraq now. We should have done the job 11 years ago when we had the chance. Before I support an attack, I want to make sure that we'll have allies who will share the costs, that we won't have more instability and that we don't neglect the wider war on terrorism.	30	50
I am opposed to authorizing an attack on Iraq. With little allied support, America will have to bear 100 percent of the cost of rebuilding Iraq. Those hundreds of billions of dollars would be better used to address our problems at home.	30	44
I'm committed, like all Americans to waging the war on terrorism. But I just don't believe in authorizing the President to go to war against Iraq. America acting alone to overthrow governments, even when they don't threaten us directly, will create more instability and make America the policeman of the world. It is the wrong thing to do.	28	43
I'm very cautious about supporting the war against Iraq at this time. It seems like the administration is heating up things now to avoid having to face the voters on the economy and corporate scandals and lack of action on health care. I want to focus on our domestic issues.	24	40

A focus on costs alone does not score as strongly. Nor does emphasizing that the US should have completed the job 11 years ago strengthen the statement.

Outright opposition to the war against Iraq and to the concept of regime change, finishing with the phrase, “it is the wrong thing to do,” produces a weak response. Only 43 percent say they would be more likely to vote for such a Democratic candidate – 14 points weaker than the response to a Democratic opponent who says, “not at this time” and sets out an aspiration for the UN and inspections and the support America needs to build.

Overall, the messages of Republican proponents of the war score comparably (56 percent more likely, with 36 percent much more likely). A Republican hawk who favors unilateral action actually scores much worse, with only 43 percent more supportive.

***The Democrat opposing the Iraq resolution can compete evenly with a Republican proponent when he or she uses the strongest rationale – not attacking now, but after showing vigilance on getting allies, sharing costs, avoiding instability and not undermining the wider war on terrorism.*** After hearing the choice, 43 percent side with the Democrat and 46 percent with the Republican – just 3 points down on an issue that favors the Republicans.

The Democratic opponent who opposes the war without allied support and then indicates, “I want to make sure we don’t lose sight of our problems at home,” is equally competitive, losing by 4 points (41 to 46 percent).

The Democratic opponent arguing that the policy is wrong loses by 15 points (39 to 54 percent) to a Republican proponent who says he or she trusts Bush to do this right.

## Democrat Opposition vs. Republican Support

	Total Dem	Total Rep	Diff
<p>The Democrat says, I'm committed to the war against terrorism and to disarming Saddam Hussein, but I am opposed to attacking Iraq at this time. Before I support an attack, I want to make sure that we'll have allies who will share the costs, that we won't have more instability and that we don't neglect the wider war on terrorism.</p> <p>versus</p> <p>The Republican says, I support the President in his determination to remove Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction. It is important that we take the lead and get the support we need to wage this battle in the war on terrorism.</p>	43	46	-3
<p>The Democrat says, I am opposed to rushing into Iraq without winning the support of our allies who would share the immense costs after the war. I want to make sure we don't lose sight of our problems at home - the weakening economy, corporate abuse, getting prescription drug coverage, protecting Social Security and cutting middle class taxes.</p> <p>versus</p> <p>The Republican says, I fully support President Bush in the war on terrorism and in dealing with Iraq. But in the Congress, I'm going to focus on the economy, prescription drug coverage for seniors, accountability in our schools, and increasing last year's tax cuts and make them permanent.</p>	41	46	-4
<p>The Democrat says, I'm committed to the war on terrorism, but I don't support the war in Iraq. America acting alone to overthrow governments, even when they don't threaten us directly, will create more instability and make America the policeman of the world. It is the wrong thing to do.</p> <p>versus</p> <p>The Republican says, I support the President's resolution because I know he will do everything possible to get the inspectors back and to win UN and allied support. President Bush rallied that kind of support after 9-11, and I trust him to rally the same kind of support in attacking Iraq.</p>	39	54	-15

### Supporting the Resolution

The Democratic supporter of the Iraq resolution has two effective lines of argument, both of which defeat the Republican who is also a supporter of the resolution authorizing force. One line, and probably the strongest at the current moment, gives voice to the prevailing reservations about proceeding at this time. The candidate indicates he will support the President but then says, "I have lots of reservations," including having allies share costs and making sure we do not cause greater instability and neglect the war on terrorism (53 percent more likely, including 26 percent much more likely).

As we shall see below, that candidate defeats the strong Republican advocate of the war by a remarkable 17 points (53 to 35 percent). People are ambivalent about this war, and supporting the President on the resolution overall gives a Member of Congress the space to voice genuine reservations. This position unifies the Democrats (77 to 11 percent) and wins handily (55 to 27 percent) among independents.

The second line of argument offers straightforward support for the President, "if he wants to go ahead," but then moves quickly to the need to address problems at home. This argument actually wins broader and more intense support than the first line of argument (56 percent more likely, including 31 percent much more likely), and therefore, is probably the more powerful positioning as one goes into the campaign period.

In the context of the current Iraq debate, however, this statement actually defeats by only 4 points a Republican statement supporting the President and making the turn to their domestic issues (43 to 38 percent). When the Democratic statement includes a strong reassurance that “we cannot let up in the war on terrorism,” the Democratic advantage rises to 7 points (44 to 37 percent).

**Democratic Statements Supporting Resolution**

	<b>Much More Lkly</b>	<b>Much Smwt Lkly</b>
<b>I'll support the President if he wants to go ahead in Iraq, but I want to make sure we get back to addressing our problems at home - the economy, prescription drugs, Social Security and middle class tax cuts.</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>I support the resolution to authorize President Bush to do what he needs to do in Iraq. We cannot let up in the war on terrorism. In the Congress, I will make sure we don't lose sight of our problems at home - the economy, prescription drugs, Social Security, and middle class tax cuts.</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>I'll support the President if he wants to use force in Iraq, though I have lots of reservations. I want to make sure that we'll have allies who will share the costs, that we won't have more instability and that we don't neglect the wider war on terrorism.</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>I support President Bush's resolution to carry the war on terrorism to Iraq. Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and disregard of the UN pose a threat to us and our allies. We should move quickly because our security is at stake.</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>43</b>

## Democrat Support versus Republican Support

	Total Dem	Total Rep	Diff
The Democrat says, I'll support the President if he wants to use force in Iraq, though I have lots of reservations. I want to make sure that we'll have allies who will share the billions in costs, that we won't have more instability and that we don't neglect the wider war on terrorism. versus	53	35	+17
The Republican says, I support the President in his determination to remove Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction. It is important that we take the initiative and get the support we need to wage this battle in the war on terrorism.			
The Democrat says, I support the resolution to authorize President Bush to do what he needs to do in Iraq. We cannot let up in the war on terrorism. In the Congress, I will make sure we don't lose sight of our problems at home - the economy, prescription drugs, Social Security, and middle class tax cuts. versus	44	37	+7
The Republican says, I fully support President Bush in the war on terrorism and in dealing with Iraq. But in the Congress, I'm going to focus on the economy, prescription drug coverage for seniors, accountability in our schools, and increasing last year's tax cuts and make them permanent.			
The Democrat says, I'll support the President if he wants to go ahead in Iraq, but I want to make sure we get back to addressing our problems at home - the economy, prescription drugs, Social Security and middle class tax cuts. versus	43	38	+4
The Republican says, I fully support President Bush in the war on terrorism and in dealing with Iraq. But in the Congress, I'm going to focus on the economy, prescription drug coverage for seniors, accountability in our schools, and making last year's tax cuts permanent.			

It is very important to recognize that a full-throated support for the President's Iraq policy, with a call to move urgently and without expressions of reservation, gets a very unenthusiastic public response. Just 43 percent say they are more likely to support a Democrat who takes this position. Indeed, only 34 percent of Democrats and 41 percent of independents say they are more likely to vote for this Democrat.

### The Transition to the Campaign

The debate and vote on the resolution will bring closure on the extended Iraq debate that has crowded out the country's domestic agenda as Congress concludes. But there is substantial evidence, as we indicated at the outset, that voters are very ready to turn to domestic issues. It is important that Democrats make this turn and provide a compelling reason to vote Democratic and turn down the Republicans.

In this survey, we tested two message frameworks – one offers a transition to the domestic agenda (“We need independent people in Washington who will be a check on what is going on and pay attention to our needs at home”) and one focuses on corporate influence (“Washington should be more responsive to the people and less to big corporate interests”). Both frameworks defeat the Republican alternative that begins with support for the President's efforts on security.

Next week, we will provide further guidance on how Democrats can frame the campaign in order to win in 2002.