

The Nation.

The War Debate Reopens

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Vice President Cheney insists that he has not read what he refers to as "the so-called Downing Street memo" — the memo that says that British officials thought that "intelligence and facts were being fixed" in Washington in 2002 to justify a war with Iraq. And despite the stream of revelations in the British press about conversations between Prime Minister Tony Blair and aides who said President George W. Bush "was determined" to attack Iraq long before going to Congress or the United Nations, Cheney again insisted during a National Press Club appearance that "any suggestion that we did not exhaust all alternatives before we got to that point [of launching the invasion], I think, is inaccurate."

An expanding number of Americans, and their elected officials, think differently. More than 500,000 people have signed a petition generated by Representative John Conyers that demands answers from the White House regarding allegations that "fixed" intelligence was used to coerce the country into a war that has cost more than 1,700 American lives and tens of thousands of Iraqi lives. Almost 100 members of the House have signed on to a letter from Conyers containing a similar demand, and a number of senators, including John Kerry and Edward Kennedy, have taken up the issue.

The Downing Street revelations come at a time when support for the war is in rapid decline. New polls show that nearly six in ten Americans now believe the war was not worth its human and economic cost, and for the first time since the war began, more than half say it has not contributed to the long-term security of the United States. A growing number of members of Congress, back from their Memorial Day break with questions about Downing Street echoing in their ears or with recollections of funerals for soldiers in their hometowns, are starting to talk about setting a timeline for bringing the troops home.

On June 14, Senator Russ Feingold introduced a resolution calling on the President and his Administration to "report to Congress with a plan and

timetable for the subsequent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq." In the House, 128 members, including five Republicans, voted in May for a similar resolution, sponsored by Representative Lynn Woolsey. Republicans Walter Jones and Ron Paul were among those set to reintroduce the resolution as a bipartisan measure. Jones is the conservative firebrand who coined the phrase "freedom fries" because of his anger at the French, two years ago, for slowing the rush to war. Now, Jones says, "Congress must be told the truth."

If the freedom-fries guy can be brought around to questioning the war, we've certainly reached a turning point. Congressman Conyers and his allies in groups like Progressive Democrats of America have reopened the debate about who is responsible for the

illegal war in Iraq and what should be done now. Calls for impeachment are beginning to be heard at the grassroots — as, for example, the Wisconsin Democratic Party's passage of an impeachment resolution at its recent state convention.

AfterDowningStreet.org, an activist coalition, is spearheading a call for a resolution of inquiry by the full House, which would require a Judiciary Committee investigation. We recognize how improbable impeachment is at this time. But the space that has been opened up by the Downing Street memo allows for conversations that were unimaginable a few months ago. Congress may not be talking impeachment, but members' calls for withdrawal are now seen as far from radical. And the momentum is on their side.

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PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS OF AMERICA

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