

A Position Comparison of Barack Obama and John McCain on Military Issues

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Summary

Iraq: Obama has consistently voted against blank checks for the war and occupation but in favor of military service members' interests. He has voted for unemployment benefits extension, a GI bill, and a bill that would have established mandatory minimum rest periods for members of the regular and reserve components of the armed forces between deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. McCain has consistently supported war funding, but has voted against extending veteran's benefits. Although they both voted against an amendment proposed in 2006 that would have required the President to withdraw troops from Iraq by July 1, 2007 ("Troop Redeployment Amendment"), Obama wants troops out of Iraq within 16 months of taking office, while McCain would not set a timetable for withdrawal.

Afghanistan: Obama supports adding 7,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan by moving some out of Iraq, while McCain says NATO should send more troops to Afghanistan.

Iran: Both candidates have stated they would use military action to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Obama would support air strikes against Iran, but he would not commit ground troops there while U.S. troops are still in Iraq, while McCain would support an attack and possible invasion of Iran. Obama supports meeting directly with Iranian leaders without preconditions to find a diplomatic solution to the nuclear weapon issue, while McCain would not meet with Iranian leaders.

Darfur: Both candidates have said they would pressure the U.N. to deploy peacekeepers to Darfur.

Campaign contributions: Out of all sector contributions, those coded as "Defense" by the Center for Responsive Politics comprise the least amount of campaign contributions for both candidates. However, tracking defense contributions is important as this sector is one of the most powerful in politics. McCain's campaign has received slightly more than Obama's from this sector.

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Table 1: Position on Iraq

| <i>Issue</i> | <i>Obama</i> | <i>McCain</i> |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Troop Withdrawal | Would withdraw all combat brigades during first 16 months in office | Would withdraw troops if Iraq is secure, no timetables. |
| Long-term U.S. presence | Would temporarily keep a much smaller "residual" force there to fight terrorists, but no permanent bases | Would support a long-term non-combat troop presence in Iraq, unless Iraqis want us to leave. Said that 100 years of U.S. troop presence in Iraq would be "fine with me as long as Americans are not being injured or harmed or wounded or killed." |
| Support for the war | Opposed going to war with Iraq in 2002 | Supported going to war with Iraq in 2002 |
| Support for troop surge | Opposed the troop surge | Believes the initial strategy in Iraq was a failure, but that the troop surge is succeeding |

Source: <http://www.votegopher.com/HTH.php>

Detailed description of Obama's position on Iraq:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=30&can=1&pid=1>

Detailed description of McCain's position on Iraq:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=30&can=3&pid=1>

Table 2: Position on Diplomacy

| <i>Issue</i> | <i>Obama</i> | <i>McCain</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| U.N. and NATO | Would increase U.S. involvement in U.N. and NATO | Would create a "League of Democracies" |
| Meeting with International Leaders | Would talk to any head of state without preconditions | Would use pressure, not talks, to deal with some nations |
| Nuclear weapons | Would work toward world without nuclear weapons | Would reduce nuclear weapons, but keep enough to deter attacks |
| Darfur | Would pressure U.N. to deploy peacekeepers to Darfur | Would pressure U.N. to deploy peacekeepers to Darfur |
| Cuba | Would lift restrictions on family travel to Cuba | Would keep embargo and travel restrictions on Cuba |

Source: <http://www.votegopher.com/HTH.php>

Detailed description of Obama's position on diplomacy:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=185&can=1&pid=1>

Detailed description of McCain's position on diplomacy:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=185&can=3&pid=1>

Table 3: Position on Responding to Terrorism

| <i>Issue</i> | <i>Obama</i> | <i>McCain</i> |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Torture | Would not allow torture; have same standards for CIA and military | Would not allow torture, but let CIA use harsher techniques |
| Guantanamo prison | Would shut down Guantanamo, try detainees in civilian courts | Would shut down Guantanamo, try detainees in military courts |
| Wiretapping | Opposes Bush wiretapping, pro-FISA compromise | Says Bush warrantless wiretapping program was legal |
| Pakistan | Supports cross-border strikes into Pakistan | Would only strike in Pakistan with government approval |
| Afghanistan | Would add 7,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan by moving some out of Iraq | Says NATO should send more troops to Afghanistan |

Source: <http://www.votegopher.com/HTH.php>

Detailed description of Obama's position on terrorism:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=13&can=1&pid=1>

Detailed description of McCain's position on terrorism:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=13&can=3&pid=1>

Table 4: Position on the Middle East

| <i>Issue</i> | <i>Obama</i> | <i>McCain</i> |
|--|--|---|
| Preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons | Would order air strikes to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons | Would attack, possibly invade, to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons |
| Sanctions against Iran | Supports sanctions on Iran, also positive incentives | Supports economic sanctions on Iran |
| Meeting with Iranian leaders | Would meet directly with Iranian leaders | Would not meet with Iranian leaders |
| Israel and Palestine | Supports aid to Israel and to Palestinians | Supports more aid to Israel |

Source: <http://www.votegopher.com/HTH.php>

Detailed description of Obama's position on the Middle East:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=186&can=1&pid=1>

Detailed description of McCain's position on the Middle East:

<http://www.votegopher.com/issue.php?issue=186&can=3&pid=1>

Table 5: Recent Votes on Key Military Issues

| <i>Bill Title</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Obama</i> | <i>McCain</i> | <i>Outcome</i> |
|--|-------------|--------------|---------------|--|
| GI Bill and Other Domestic Provisions S Amdt 4803 | 5/22/08 | Yes | NV* | Adopted-Senate (75-22) |
| Defense Authorizations Bill HR 4986 | 1/22/08 | NV | NV | Bill Passed - Senate (91 - 3) |
| Additional Funding For Veterans Amendment S 2020 | 11/17/05 | Yes | No | Motion Rejected - Senate (43 - 55) |
| Health Care for Veterans Amendment HR 2863 | 10/05/05 | Yes | No | Motion Failed - Senate (48 - 51) |
| Iraq and Afghanistan War Funding, Unemployment Benefits Extension, and GI Bill HR 2642 | 6/26/08 | Yes | NV | Concurrence Vote Passed - Senate (92 - 6) |
| Funding for Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan S Amdt 4818 | 5/22/08 | NV | NV | Amendment Adopted - Senate (70 - 26) |
| Iraq Troop Reduction S Amdt 2087 | 7/18/07 | Yes | No | Cloture Not Invoked - Senate (52 - 47) |
| Iraq Troop Reduction Amendment S Amdt 2898 | 9/21/07 | Yes | No | Amendment Rejected - Senate (47 - 47) |
| Time Between Troop Deployments S Amdt 2909 | 9/19/07 | Yes | No | Amendment Rejected - Senate (56 - 44) |
| Supplemental Appropriations for the Department of Defense and Timeline for Withdrawal from Iraq HR 4156 | 11/16/07 | Yes | NV | Cloture Not Invoked - Senate (53 - 45) |
| Emergency Departmental Supplemental Appropriations Bill of 2007 HR 2206 | 5/24/07 | No | Yes | Concurrence Vote Passed - Senate (80 - 14) |
| Oversight of CIA Interrogation and Detention Amendment S 3930 | 9/28/06 | Yes | No | Amendment Rejected - Senate (46 - 53) |
| Troop Redeployment Amendment S 2766 | 6/22/06 | No | No | Amendment Rejected - Senate (13 - 86) |
| Military Funding and Tax Cuts Amendment HR 4297 | 2/02/08 | Yes | No | Motion Failed - Senate (44 - 53) |

Table 5 Continued

| | | | | |
|---|----------|----|-----|---|
| Use of Military Force Against Iraq H J Res 114 | 10/11/02 | NA | Yes | Joint Resolution Adopted - Senate (77 - 23) |
|---|----------|----|-----|---|

*No vote

Source: Project Vote Smart: <http://www.votesmart.org>.

Obama's full voting record: http://www.votesmart.org/voting_category.php?can_id=9490

McCain's full voting record:

http://www.votesmart.org/voting_category.php?can_id=53270

Table 6: Campaign Contributions by Sector

| <i>Campaign Contributions</i> | <i>Obama</i> | <i>McCain</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Agribusiness | \$1,416,758 | \$2,893,380 |
| Communications/Electronics | \$15,742,903 | \$4,001,170 |
| Construction | \$3,311,217 | \$4,550,505 |
| Defense | \$561,054 | \$578,062 |
| Energy & Natural Resources | \$1,636,691 | \$3,431,396 |
| Finance, Insurance & Real Estate | \$27,400,471 | \$24,998,463 |
| Health | \$10,953,209 | \$6,306,020 |
| Lawyers & Lobbyists | \$27,944,975 | \$10,249,244 |
| Transportation | \$1,045,334 | \$2,321,094 |
| Misc Business | \$20,456,041 | \$13,415,147 |
| Labor | \$186,641 | \$15,750 |
| Ideological/Single-Issue | \$5,747,476 | \$4,243,823 |
| Other | \$48,649,316 | \$34,664,294 |

Source: Center for Responsive Politics: <http://www.opensecrets.org>.

All figures are for the 2008 election cycle and based on Federal Commission data released on Monday, September 29, 2008. Obama's campaign contributions:

<http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/indus.php?cid=N00009638&cycle=2008>

McCain's campaign contributions:

<http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/indus.php?cid=N00006424&cycle=2008>