

New York's City Council opposes Iraq war

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An antiwar vote Wednesday by the City Council in New York, the city that suffered the greatest loss of life in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, has further exposed the Bush administration's hypocritical attempt to exploit those deaths as a pretext for aggression against Iraq.

With a 31-17 vote, the New York City Council joined nearly 150 other cities and counties that have passed measures opposing war.

The vote in New York, however, was particularly significant given the deaths of nearly 3,000 people at the World Trade Center 19 months ago. The Bush administration has repeatedly invoked this atrocity as the principal argument for going to war, despite the absence of any evidence linking the regime in Baghdad to the terrorist attacks. In passing the measure, the council rejected this argument as well as explicit appeals to support the war in the name of the September 11 victims.

Opposition to the looming war appears greater in New York City than in the country as a whole. Recent polls have shown less than 20 percent of New Yorkers supporting a unilateral US attack against Iraq and nearly half opposing war under any circumstances.

These polls, like the council vote itself, are a pale reflection of the overwhelming opposition that exists to the Bush administration's policy of military aggression.

The resolution passed by the council opposed any military action unless it could be demonstrated that "Iraq poses a real and imminent threat to the security and safety of the United States" and that all other options for achieving compliance with UN resolutions had failed. The resolution further called for UN weapons inspectors to be given "a full and fair opportunity" to complete their work.

Initially, just two City Council members introduced the resolution last October, and it was widely expected

that it would never come to a vote. Most measures that are brought before the full body are backed by a substantial share of the 26-vote majority needed for passage.

By the middle of last month, on the eve of a February 15 demonstration that saw over half a million people take to the streets of New York in opposition to war, only eight other Council members had signed on to the bill and it had not even been assigned to a committee.

It was clear that the shift came as council members sniffed the political winds and concluded that their constituencies were overwhelmingly opposed to an attack on Iraq, making approval of a resolution a safe political move.

Before it was brought to a vote, however, the body's Democratic leadership worked to soften the language of the measure, removing sections sharply critical of the Bush administration. These included warnings that the war "could bring with it the most devastating consequences imaginable, not just in the Middle East but to our own shores as well" and that the Bush administration's doctrine of preemptive war could lead to the eruption of military aggression around the globe.

In the debate before a packed City Council chamber, Republican and right-wing Democratic Council members denounced the resolution as "anti-American," invoking both support of US troops in the Persian Gulf and memory of the September 11 victims. One Democrat held up a picture of a friend killed at the World Trade Center and insisted that the war the Bush administration is preparing will be a "fight for our democracy."

The bill's principal sponsor, Harlem Democrat Bill Perkins, defended the measure. "With our economy in peril, a war in Iraq will drain urgently needed resources for our cities, our suburbs and our small towns," he said. "And there is the human price of war. Those who declare war are usually not the ones who have to fight

it.”

Other major cities that have passed resolutions opposing a US war against Iraq include Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, Baltimore, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Seattle and Milwaukee.



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