

Iraqi Parliament passes US security pact

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Iraqi Parliament has approved by majority vote a security pact between Baghdad and Washington that calls for US troops withdrawal by 2011.

Parliament speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani said Thursday an overwhelming majority of the lawmakers who attended the session voted in favor of the pact.

The agreement was passed on Thursday with 144 of the 198 lawmakers present voting in favor. A total of 35 other lawmakers also voted against the agreement.

The vote was supported by the governing coalition and the Kurdish blocs as well as the largest Sunni Arab bloc in parliament, which had demanded concessions for supporting the deal.

The Thursday parliamentary session also saw scenes of disruption from lawmakers loyal to the Sadr bloc.

The US and Iraq had been at loggerheads for the past 11 months over key issues in the deal.

The pact -which had earlier been approved by the Iraqi Cabinet- will now provide ground for the US troops to stay in the war-torn country beyond their UN mandate which expires in December.

Under the deal, US forces will pull out of Iraqi cities by June 30 and the entire country by the end of 2011. Iraq will oversee the activities of the US troops during the period.

The pact must be rubber stamped by Iraq's Presidential Council and is scheduled to be put to referendum on July 30, 2009.

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