

Clinton and Kerry set Democrats' pro-war agenda for 2006 election

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In a pair of key back-to-back political interventions early this week, former Democratic President Bill Clinton and the party's defeated 2004 presidential candidate, John Kerry, set a clear militarist agenda for the Democrats in November's midterm election.

Clinton's pronouncement came in the midst of a heated interview Sunday with Chris Wallace of the right-wing Fox News television channel.

Pressed by Wallace as to why his administration had not done more to suppress Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, the former Democratic Clinton launched into an angry response in which he charged—accurately enough—that Wallace's question was part of a concerted campaign by Republican “right-wingers” to falsify history and divert public attention from the disastrous failures of the Bush administration's policies.

Clinton's counter-attack, however, was not an indictment of the administration for its criminal policy of aggressive war—indeed he voiced not a word of criticism over the ongoing debacle in Iraq—but rather a defense of his own record as a proponent of military aggression.

The most extraordinary portion of his passionate defense of his—and by extension the Democratic Party's—record was his assertion that he had elaborated plans to conquer and occupy Afghanistan, nearly one year before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington.

“After the [the October 12, 2000 bombing of the US destroyer] Cole,” Clinton said in the interview, “I had battle plans drawn to go into Afghanistan, overthrow the Taliban, and launch a full-scale attack search for bin Laden.”

The only thing that stopped him from launching the war begun by Bush one year later, he said, was that the US military “needed basing rights in Uzbekistan,” which were obtained only after 9/11. He also cited the delay by the CIA and FBI in certifying that bin Laden was responsible for the bombing of the Cole, an action the two agencies took only after Bush entered the White House.

Clinton continued by declaring, “If I were still president, we'd have more than 20,000 troops there trying to kill” Osama bin Laden.

What Clinton's statement reveals is that the program of global militarism launched by the Bush administration in the aftermath of September 11 was a consensus policy of the American ruling elite, supported by both of its major parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

Indeed, it would appear that the first war launched by the Bush White House, in Afghanistan, was based on plans drawn up by the Clinton administration.

This intervention to oust Taliban regime, like the unprovoked war against Iraq, was directed principally neither at quashing terrorism nor at aiding a people living under dictatorship. Rather, it was the realization of longstanding US ambitions to exert hegemony over the oil-rich regions of Central Asia and the Middle East. Democrats and Republicans alike have sought to exploit the September 11 attacks and to promote the “global war on terror” as a pretext for pursuing these imperialist aims.

Clinton complained that the Republicans maligned the Democrats as “weak on terror” in the last midterm elections, held in 2002. “Our party supported them in undertaking weapons inspections in Iraq and was 100 percent for what happened in Afghanistan, and they didn't have any way to make us look like we didn't care about terror,” he declared, charging that Republican strategists deliberately provoked a conflict, introducing “poison pill” into the homeland security legislation by proposing to strip some 170,000 federal employees of civil service protections.

The reality is that the Democrats granted Bush unprecedented power to launch an unprovoked war as part of a cynical—and cowardly—electoral strategy that sought to get the Iraq issue off the table, and to appeal to the electorate solely on economic and social issues. Amid the open buildup to war, the party offered no alternative to those who opposed such aggression. At the same time, it could put forward no serious policies to address unemployment, declining living standards and questions of healthcare and education. As the result, an administration that had come to power through a stolen election and which was widely opposed scored significant gains in both houses.

As Clinton's remarks make clear, the Democratic leadership intends to wage this new midterm election by once again dodging any serious debate on Iraq. This time, however, it intends to paint the Bush administration as “soft on terrorism” and promote the Democratic Party as the champion of a military escalation in Afghanistan.

Clinton also boasted that “Reagan's secretary of the navy,” James Webb, is running as the Democratic candidate for Senator in Virginia and that “a three-star admiral, who was on my National Security Council staff, who also fought terror,” Joe Sestak, is challenging a Republican incumbent for a congressional seat in Pennsylvania. “We've got a huge military presence here in this campaign,” Clinton declared. “And we just can't let them have some rhetorical device that puts us in a box we don't belong in.”

In a column drafted for the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, Massachusetts Democratic Senator John Kerry—the party's 2004 presidential candidate—sounded a similar theme. Lamenting the rising opposition to the US-led occupation of Afghanistan, Kerry

declared: “We must change course—starting with the immediate deployment of at least 5,000 additional US troops.”

He continued, “That includes more special forces to defeat the Taliban, more civil affairs troops to bolster the promising Provisional Reconstruction Teams, more infantry to prevent Taliban infiltration from Pakistan, and more clandestine intelligence units to hunt al Qaeda on both sides of the border. That also means more Predator drones to provide real-time intelligence, more helicopters and transport aircraft to allow rapid deployment, and more heavy combat equipment to overpower enemy forces.”

Kerry concluded: “The US must not cut and run from the real front line in the war on terror. We must recommit to victory in Afghanistan.”

Clinton’s interview and Kerry’s column make it clear that the Democratic leadership is above all determined not to allow the Republicans to attack the party as “weak on security” or “soft on terrorism” in the run-up to the November election.

That this is a coordinated national strategy has become clear as the Democratic leadership has sat on its hands and kept its mouth shut as the Bush administration seeks to ram through legislation granting it a license to torture as well the power to hold drumhead capital punishment trials for alleged “enemy combatants” and to conduct wholesale spying on the American people. It has kept on the sidelines as a handful of Republican lawmakers have raised objections to the bills.

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean, meanwhile, praised Clinton for his performance on Fox News. “President Clinton stood up to the misleading tactics of the right-wing propaganda machine,” Dean declared. “As the National Intelligence Estimate that was reported on today showed, the Iraq War and the Bush administration’s failed policies have hurt our ability to win the war on terror. As President Clinton said, Democrats stand for policies that are both tough and smart and we remain committed to winning the war on terror.”

And Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, echoed this rhetoric, although in her own painfully inarticulate manner. In a statement posted on her senate web site, she responded to the testimony Monday of three recently retired military commanders before a Democratic panel on the war in Iraq. While criticizing Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the officers called for an expansion of the war, with many more troops and a long-term military presence.

Army Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton, who headed the training of the Iraqi military, testified that some 60,000 more troops should be

deployed in Iraq. Maj. Gen. John Batiste, former commander of the Army’s 1st Infantry Division in Iraq, declared, “There is no substitute for victory and I believe we must complete what we started in Iraq and Afghanistan.” He added, “We must mobilize our country for a protracted challenge.” A third witness, a Marine colonel, said that the war would have to go on for another decade or more.

Expressing general agreement with these calls for an escalation of US violence in Iraq, Hillary Clinton declared, “Our problem with dealing with the administration is, as what we said, you know, their rhetoric has not been matched by resources or resolve in the way that it needs to be and so we constantly hear the drumbeat of you know, ‘We can’t change, we have to do this’ as we are being told it has to be done.”

What all of this campaign rhetoric makes abundantly clear is that in 2006—as in 2002 and 2004—the Democratic Party will ensure that the election will not be turned into a referendum on the Bush administration’s decision to wage a war of aggression in Iraq.

Rather, the Democrats are determined to wage a struggle against the Bush administration based on the premise that it has bungled the war, which can be waged more effectively, and thereby has diverted military resources needed for Afghanistan and new wars yet to come.

While Democratic leaders offer plans for escalating the war in Afghanistan and solidarize themselves with officers advocating an indefinite and expanded occupation of Iraq, there is no major figure in the party who has put forward a proposal for the withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq—the course of action that successive opinion polls indicate is favored by a clear majority of the American people. This vast portion of the population, which recognizes the war as the most burning issue, is once again effectively disenfranchised by the two-party system.

A genuine struggle against the war in Iraq and the threat of even more terrible wars of aggression can be waged only by breaking the political monopoly exercised by these two parties controlled by the US financial oligarchy. It requires the emergence of a new and independent mass political party of working people, based on a socialist program that confronts the root cause of war, the profit system itself.

This is what the Socialist Equality Party and its candidates are fighting for in the 2006 election, advancing a socialist alternative to the bipartisan program of war, attacks on democratic rights, and the destruction of living standards and social conditions for American working people.

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