

# US: Mass opposition grows to Iraq war

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In the face of the bloodbath that Washington is unleashing against the people of Iraq, mass opposition to the war and popular support for the withdrawal of US troops from the occupied country has soared among the American people.

Secretary of State Colin Powell speaking in Copenhagen, Denmark, on Thursday, was forced to acknowledge plummeting public support for the war and occupation. "April has been a particularly bad month for casualties," he said. "This causes people to stop and think and reflect, 'What are we doing?' and you can expect that to be reflected in the polls."

The latest of these polls, conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS News, shows a clear majority—58 percent—affirming that the war "was not worth the loss of American life," while half of those polled said that Washington should withdraw all US troops from the country "as soon as possible," regardless of whether "stability" had been imposed upon Iraq.

Given the insistence by both the Republican and Democratic parties that the US must "stay the course" in Iraq and the role played by the mass media in uncritically regurgitating every lie told by the administration to justify the war, these figures are a staggering indictment of the chasm that exists between the American people and the entire US political establishment.

The "bad month" referred to by Powell is almost at an end, but there is no prospect for a halt to the bloodletting in Iraq. So far this month, at least 134 US troops have been killed, while over 800 have been wounded in action. As a chilling article by Karl Vick of the *Washington Post* made clear, a significant section of those listed as wounded have suffered severe head injuries and are being shipped back to the US brain-dead.

"The practice, subject to review after gathering feedback from families, assumes that loved ones will find value in holding the soldier's hand before confronting the decision to remove life support," writes Vick.

The occupation authorities have made it a principle not to count Iraqis killed by US forces, but the toll this month is clearly in the thousands, with women and children making up many of the dead and maimed. According to an article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on Thursday, the US military itself estimates the number of deaths in Fallujah as somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000.

There is every indication that Washington intends to dramatically escalate the slaughter. The US military is rushing at least 48 M1A1 Abrams tanks to Iraq from Germany and

elsewhere to reinforce the 7,000 Marines participating in the siege of the central Iraqi city of Fallujah. These 68-ton armored vehicles are designed for tank warfare and are useless for patrolling urban areas. The sole purpose they can serve in Iraq is leveling buildings and killing those within them.

Military commanders in Iraq claimed Thursday that the Marines will turn over Fallujah to an all-Iraqi force led by former Baathist generals. Officials at the Pentagon, however, said they knew nothing about such an agreement. Talk of such a force is aimed at deflecting the worldwide outpouring of opposition to the slaughter in the Iraqi city and at better preparing a murderous assault. To the extent such a force is created, it will serve only as the cat's paw for such an onslaught, giving the US the pretext of intervening to protect its Iraqi stooges against the "terrorists" and "thugs."

As one senior military official told the *Los Angeles Times*, the shelling and bombing of Fallujah over the past few days is only the prelude to a full-scale assault. "When we go in, you'll see, we're going to go in with heavy armor, and we're going to kill people," he said. Meanwhile, jet fighters attacked the city again Thursday.

The newspaper also quoted Major General John Sattler as saying that crushing Fallujah "would send a message" to other Iraqis that resistance to the occupation is futile. In other words, the US military is carrying out collective punishment against a city of 300,000 with the aim of terrorizing the entire population of Iraq into submission.

In Washington, the Bush administration continues to lie about US military operations in an attempt to conceal their criminal character from the American people.

On Wednesday, Bush made the astounding statement that life in most of Fallujah was "returning to normal." This as jet fighters, AC-130 gunships and tanks continued to pound the city, whose residents are faced with a massive humanitarian crisis, lacking electricity and in many cases water, and living in fear of sudden death even in their own homes.

Pleas by the people of Fallujah for international intervention on their behalf have fallen upon deaf ears. A delegation of city officials reached Amman last week to ask officials of the United Nations, the European Union and the Arab League to intervene to stop the killing.

While warning that US repression would only intensify Iraqi resistance, UN General Secretary Koffi Annan said that the

international body had no power to intervene and could do nothing until “security” improved in Iraq. For its part, the Arab League put off its meeting last month until May, with the corrupt and cowardly Arab bourgeois leaders unwilling to even pass a resolution that might offend Washington.

Neither the Democratic Party’s presumed candidate, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, nor any other leading Democratic politician has condemned the siege of Fallujah, which is a war crime in the full sense of the term. Instead, Kerry has exhausted much of his political capital over the past week trying to distance himself from his protest 33 years ago against the war crimes carried out by the US military in Vietnam.

Besides the figures showing a huge percentage of the US population opposing the US occupation of Iraq, the other remarkable thing about the latest poll is the evidence that the growth in antiwar sentiment has done nothing to lift the political fortunes of Kerry and the Democrats.

This is hardly an accident. Since winning the number of delegates needed to secure the Democratic presidential nomination, Kerry and the party leadership have repudiated the entire antiwar constituency that played such a prominent role in the Democratic primaries.

The groundwork for this turn was laid with the orchestrated demolition of the campaign of Howard Dean, who was seen as too closely associated with antiwar sentiments. Kerry, who voted to authorize the Iraq invasion, was advanced as the “electable” alternative. The objective of this political maneuver was to prevent the election from being turned into a national referendum on the war.

Since then, Kerry has repeatedly declared his support for the continued occupation of Iraq, insisting that even more troops should be sent to occupy the country.

In a radio address earlier this month, he declared that while “Americans differ about whether and how we should have gone to war...it would be unthinkable now for us to retreat.... All Americans are united in backing our troops and meeting commitments to help the people of Iraq build a country that is stable, peaceful, tolerant and free.”

But, as the CBS/*New York Times* poll graphically demonstrates, “all Americans” are hardly united in support of the Iraq occupation. Fully half of them want American troops brought home and an end to the US intervention. Yet, the US two-party political system has served to totally exclude their views and desires from the political process.

Some of Kerry’s “left” supporters, who advanced his candidacy as the sole means of ending the war and other reactionary policies of the Bush administration, have taken to chiding the Democratic candidate, attributing his public support of the occupation to political opportunism.

The *Nation*, which earlier branded as illegitimate any form of political activity—including the campaign of Ralph Nader—that cut across the election of the Democratic candidate in

November, now calls upon Kerry to resurrect the antiwar politics he espoused as a young man. It urges him to speak “from his gut” and “challenge Bush’s entire vision.”

Such appeals are worse than useless. They serve only to foster illusions in a thoroughly right-wing candidate who has embraced all of the essential policies of the Bush administration.

Kerry’s rightward turn is not driven by mere electoral calculations. It is clear that opposing the occupation could win massive popular support. However, he is speaking not to the masses of American working people, but to the American financial elite, whose interests and fortunes are bound up with militarism and the drive to assert US global hegemony by means of aggression and conquest. He is attempting to convince this ruling layer, which has no intention of relinquishing control of Iraq and its oil wealth, that he can do a better job in carrying out this policy than the present occupant of the White House.

There is no means within the two-party system of opposing the war and occupation or answering the pleas of the Iraqi people for an end to the barbaric siege of Fallujah and the countless other crimes being carried out in the name of the American people.

What is required is the building of a new, independent socialist movement of working people able to mobilize the vast opposition to militarism that exists in the US, to provide a means of political struggle for the millions who are sickened by the killing in Iraq and want it to end now.

The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2004 elections to begin the struggle for the building of such a movement. Our candidates are placing at the center of this campaign the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq. We intend to provide a political alternative for those whose opposition to the war has been branded as illegitimate by both the parties controlled by big business.

We call upon all those looking for a way to fight against this war, against social reaction and the assault on democratic rights to join our campaign, fight to place our candidates on the ballot and carry forward the broadest possible discussion on the socialist program advanced by the SEP.



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