

Kerry on “Meet the Press:” Democratic candidate reiterates support for Iraq war

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In an hour-long appearance Sunday on the NBC News program “Meet the Press,” the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, Senator John Kerry, reiterated his support for the US war in Iraq, while suggesting that it would take the election of a new president for Washington to succeed in mobilizing additional foreign troops and resources to reinforce its grip on the conquered country.

Kerry underscored his solidarity with the Bush administration’s policy of crushing the mass uprising that has brought together Sunni Muslims in the west-central area of Iraq and Shiites in Baghdad and the south in a common struggle against the occupation forces. Saying the US should send in more troops if necessary to defeat the insurgency and prevent a failure of the Iraq occupation, the Democratic candidate declared, “Number one, we cannot fail.”

“Meet the Press” interviewer Tim Russert asked Kerry about an op-ed column he wrote for the *Washington Post* last week, in which he stated: “Our country has committed to help the Iraqis build a stable, peaceful and pluralistic society. No matter who is elected president in November, we will persevere in that mission.” Kerry replied by repeating his unconditional endorsement of the American occupation, leading Russert to respond, “That sounds exactly like George Bush.”

The program began with Russert asking Kerry, “Do you believe the war in Iraq was a mistake?” Kerry replied, “I think the way the president went to war is a mistake.” This set the tone for the entire interview, as Russert asked no further questions about the decision to go to war and focused entirely on Kerry’s prescriptions for fighting the war more effectively.

Kerry made repeated criticisms of Bush’s conduct of the war. He said, “This administration misled America,” and declared that Bush “broke faith with his own promises to the country.” He added, “Iraq had nothing to do with Al Qaeda.” But Russert did not ask how a war based on such lies could be legitimate, and Kerry did not volunteer an opinion.

Instead, Kerry again voiced a theme first raised in a speech

last week in New York City: that the criteria for a successful completion of the US intervention in Iraq would be the creation of a stable regime, not the establishment of a democracy. Following Kerry’s pronouncement that “we cannot fail” in Iraq, the following exchange took place:

Russert: How do you define failure?

Kerry: Well, I think failure is the lack of a stable Iraq. I think a failed state in Iraq is failure.

Russert: An Islamic regime similar to Iran would be acceptable?

Kerry: You could even go further than what I just said and suggest that if we are stuck for a long period of time in a quagmire where young Americans are dying without a sense of that being able to be achieved, I think most Americans will decide that’s failure.

Russert: Could you accept a Shiite theocracy running Iraq similar to what we have in Iran?

Kerry: I think that what is important is to have a pluralistic representation. It doesn’t have to be, at least in the early days, the kind of democracy this administration has talked about, though that’s our goal and we should remain there. But what is critical is a stable Iraq.

In other words, a President Kerry would scrap the messianic and increasingly ludicrous rhetoric of the Bush administration about democratizing Iraq and the entire Middle East, and get down to business: creating the stable conditions required for American capitalism to extract super profits from Iraq’s oil resources, under some form of clerical/military dictatorship propped up by American troops.

In the course of the interview, Kerry also declared that if he is elected, there could well be 100,000 or more American troops in Iraq a year from now. Kerry went on to say, “Tim, let me be very clear to you: We are united around our troops. We support our troops. They’re extraordinarily courageous. We have the best military we’ve ever had in the history of our country, and they deserve a strategy that’s going to minimize the risk to them. But I am united, along with everybody else, in knowing that we have to have a success

in not having a failed Iraq. That we are united in.”

This declaration of unity is Kerry’s assurance to the American ruling elite that whatever criticisms he may make of the Bush administration’s tactics in the war—particularly its dismissal of the views of nominal allies like France and Germany, and its contempt for institutions like the United Nations—he is committed to maintaining US control of Iraq. With its strategic position in the center of the Middle East, and its vast oil reserves, a US-dominated Iraq has become a vital interest of American imperialism, and will not be given up lightly.

Reassuring the ruling class has been Kerry’s main focus all week. At a public forum at City College in New York, he seized on a question from a vocal critic of the war to underscore his support of the US occupation. Retired mathematics professor Walter Daum denounced the war in Iraq as imperialist, and warned that a President Kerry would quickly become as hated as Bush if he continued Bush’s policies in Iraq.

Kerry did not try to interrupt his antagonist—evidently welcoming the opportunity to distance himself from antiwar sentiment. He then replied, “I have consistently been critical of how we got where we are. But we are where we are, sir, and it would be unwise beyond belief for the United States of America to leave a failed Iraq in its wake.”

Later he gave a speech to a fundraising event that netted nearly \$3.5 million from Wall Street fat cats and other corporate executives in which he flatly declared his opposition to “redistribution of the wealth,” and pledged a Kerry administration to fiscal responsibility and deficit reduction.

On “Meet the Press,” Kerry gave other assurances of the right-wing foreign policy his administration would pursue. Asked about the Israeli assassination of Hamas leader Abdelaziz Rantisi, he responded, “I believe Israel has every right in the world to respond to any act of terror against it. Hamas is a terrorist, brutal organization.” He also gave uncritical support to Bush’s decision last week to reverse four decades of American foreign policy by officially supporting Israeli retention of West Bank land illegally occupied by Israeli settlers.

Finally, Kerry made what amounts to a repudiation of the antiwar stance which first brought him to public attention during the Vietnam War. Russert played a tape of Kerry’s first appearance on “Meet the Press,” in April 1971, when the Democratic candidate was a leader of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The young former Navy lieutenant showed considerable personal courage by going on national television to admit his own involvement in actions—search-and-destroy missions, the burning of villages and other atrocities—which violated the Geneva Conventions.

More importantly, the antiwar veteran compared the leaders of the US government to Lt. William Calley, who was tried and convicted of mass murder in the My Lai massacre: “All of this is contrary to the Geneva Conventions and all of this ordered as a matter of written established policy by the government of the United States from the top down. And I believe that the men who designed these, the men who designed the free-fire zone, the men who ordered us, the men who signed off the air raid strike areas, I think these men, by the letter of the law, the same letter of the law that tried Lieutenant Calley, are war criminals.”

Thirty-three years later, as a senator who is auditioning for the position of war-criminal-in-chief, Kerry was called upon to make a public act of contrition. Under prompting from Russert, Kerry declared that “atrocities” was “a bad word ... an inappropriate word.” As for calling presidents Johnson and Nixon and their top generals war criminals, he told Russert: “It was, I think, a reflection of the kind of times we found ourselves in and I don’t like it when I hear it today.”

At the same time, Kerry tried to have it both ways. “There were breaches of the Geneva Conventions,” in Vietnam, he said. “There were policies in place that were not acceptable according to the laws of warfare, and everybody knows that.” He concluded: “I’m proud that I took the position that I took to oppose it. I think we saved lives, and I’m proud that I stood up at a time when it was important to stand up, but I’m not going to quibble, you know, 35 years later that I might not have phrased things more artfully at times.”

The issue, of course, is not artfulness, but truth. The young Lieutenant Kerry of 1971 gained national attention because he provided at least a glimpse of the brutal reality of imperialist war. The Senator Kerry of 2004 seeks to trade on his antiwar reputation to delude voters opposed to the current imperialist war in Iraq—a war, which, as the events in Fallujah are making clear, rivals Vietnam in its barbaric and wanton disregard for human life.



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