

An exchange on Nader, Kerry and the US war in Iraq

Patrick Martin
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Reader Elliott writes, in response to the article posted May 22 on the WSWS, "Nader Gets His Meeting with Kerry".

WSWS does a great job of reporting when it relies on factual based writings. When WSWS allows its writers to published biased, unjustified speculation—you show yourself to be unprofessional and diatribe prone—as easily illustrated with Martin’s essay (could it be any longer?)

As a Nader Scholar, who has read and watched nearly every Nader writing and speech, I must tell you that you are simply ill-informed about Nader’s policy.

Firstly, Ralph Nader IS an Independent Candidate, so your use of quotation marks to surround Independent illustrates Martin’s biased opinion. Nader IS a principled alternative to the duopoly, as Martin attempts to refute, which the likes of Chomsky, Moore, Kucinich and others have supported. Martin must be joking to say that Ralph isn’t a “serious” alternative—if only WSWS had the long standing advocacy record Nader holds (40 + years). His merit is unquestionable.

Martin’s main attempt to form an argument comes when he says Nader and Kerry didn’t talk about the war in Iraq very much, nor the prison torture of innocent Iraqis—therefore Ralph doesn’t hold concern or repair measure policy in place. IF you visit votenerd.org, and/or listened to Ralph speak you would know better. Instead, you make an illogic leap of mass proportions by assuming that little discussion means little action. I mean, Nader and Kerry didn’t talk about Central American Coups (something which is happening today)—but Nader’s longstanding record suffices to prove he is against them. Likewise with the AIDS crisis in Africa.

Finally, Martin’s diatribe, “Nader’s talk of counterposing the ‘mainstream Iraqis’ and the ‘insurgents’ indicates that he accepts the official pretexts for the colonialist war—the claim that the US intervened for the purpose of ‘liberating’ Iraq, and the no less cynical lie that the armed opposition enjoys little popular support and consists entirely of terrorists, criminals and remnants of the regime of Saddam Hussein.” Martin has failed to do ANY research on Nader’s views and/or policies which illustrate the exact opposite of the ludicrous connection Martin attempts to make—an unsympathetic, non-humanistic Nader.

WSWS is not going to be a minor player in this election. Play fair and people like me might respect you more. But you’ll never receive political legitimacy (something you haven’t earned yet) if you publish this unpublishable slander.

Patrick Martin replies:

You reject our criticism of Ralph Nader’s position on Iraq as an “unpublishable slander.” However, you fail to support this complaint with any actual citation from Nader’s own policy statements, nor do you address the substance of what appeared in the WSWS article.

First, a few preliminaries. You object to the suggestion, through the use of quote marks around the term, that Nader is not truly an “independent” candidate. Here, of course, we are concerned not merely with the verbal professions of a candidate—Nader will appear on the ballot as an

independent or non-party candidate in those states where he does not appear as the nominee of the Greens or the Reform Party—but with genuine political independence from the ruling elite which dominates American society.

From the standpoint of Marxism, the WSWS evaluates a political figure not merely on his/her relationship to the established two-party system, but in relation to the capitalist economic framework which that political system defends. Nader is an avowed opponent of socialism and a supporter of the profit system, albeit with certain reforms. He cannot be considered independent of the existing capitalist order in any fundamental sense.

Even in the more restricted meaning of independence from the Democratic and Republican parties, it would be ludicrous to describe Nader as independent. He runs quite openly as a supporter, once-removed, of the Democratic Party, offering advice and suggestions to Kerry, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, and even declaring that his campaign will facilitate both a Democratic victory in the presidential campaign and the election of a Democratic-controlled House and Senate.

You cite the support for Nader by “the likes of Chomsky, Moore, Kucinich and others,” as though this was an argument in your favor. Where are these worthies today? Noam Chomsky is firmly in the “anybody but Bush” camp, supporting the election of Kerry. Michael Moore backed former general Wesley Clark for the Democratic presidential nomination; Clark is now a leading contender to become Kerry’s vice-presidential running mate. And Dennis Kucinich is a Democratic congressman who is still continuing his campaign for the presidential nomination of that party. If Chomsky, Moore and Kucinich have supported Nader at one time or another in the past, this only proves our point: Ralph Nader has at least one foot in the camp of the Democratic Party; his “independence” of the Democrats is nominal.

In passing, you make a sally against the WSWS which simply displays a lack of historical knowledge. You suggest that it is illegitimate to question Nader’s oppositional stature because of his many years as a critic of corporate America, exclaiming: “If only WSWS had the longstanding advocacy record Nader holds (40 + years).” The WSWS, it is true, was founded in 1998. That was not our point of origin, however, but rather marked a change in the form through which the Trotskyist movement has sought to conduct its political work internationally. The WSWS was created by the International Committee of the Fourth International, founded in 1953, representing the continuity of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, and of the October 1917 Russian Revolution. The WSWS is the product of nearly a century of continuous struggle for Marxism in the international working class—in the course of which we have seen many would-be reformers of capitalism, like Mr. Nader, come and go.

Now to the main issue: Nader’s position on the war with Iraq, and in that context, his maneuvers with Senator Kerry. You simply fail to address the substance of our critique, that Nader shares the basic strategic

orientation of American imperialism. We quoted Nader's reference to separating "insurgents" and "mainstream Iraqis" to show that he makes the same analysis of the different tendencies within Iraq as the Bush administration, the Democratic Party and the corporate-controlled media.

Who are these mainstream Iraqis? Even according to US-run polls of the Iraqi population, the Shiite radical cleric Moqtada Sadr was regarded favorably by nearly 60 percent of Iraqis prior to the April uprising in the Baghdad slums and in southern Iraq. By contrast, support for such US-backed stooges as Ahmed Chalabi and the CIA-financed Iyad Allawi is miniscule. More than 80 percent of the Iraqi population wants the US forces to be removed immediately. The Iraqi insurgents—the armed resistance fighters in Falluja, Najaf and other cities—are a genuine expression of popular anti-American and anti-colonial sentiment. They cannot be counterposed to the "mainstream" because they represent the mainstream.

I would not press an analogy between the current situation in Iraq and the American Revolution except in this: I have no doubt that somewhere in the British Colonial Office in 1776 there was a strategist writing about the need to separate the "insurgents" at Concord and Lexington from the "mainstream Americans" who were loyal to their king. Such distinctions are characteristic of every colonial and counterrevolutionary war in history. The method is known as "divide and conquer."

Nader's embrace of this terminology is not a one-time thing or a verbal slip. On his web site, www.votenader.org, is posted a statement on the war which repeats the same phrasing: "US presence serves as fuel for the insurrection, kidnapping, terrorism and anarchy. Since the occupation is increasingly turning mainstream Iraqis against the US; announcing a withdrawal and ending the corporate takeover of the Iraqi economy and oil resources will attract their support away from the insurgents."

Nader advocates a three-step process for removal of US troops and replacing them with United Nations forces, followed by elections and US humanitarian aid. It must be emphasized that the switch from US to UN troops would still entail an imperialist and colonialist occupation of Iraq, only by soldiers wearing French, German, Russian, Indian or Nigerian uniforms instead of American, and responsible to the UN Security Council, itself one of the key institutions of world imperialism.

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The only policy which is consistent with respect for the national and democratic rights of the Iraqi people is the complete removal of all foreign troops—not only the American troops—and the payment of compensation for the damage inflicted by 12 years of UN sanctions and more than a year of war and occupation.

To be sure, Nader combines his advocacy of UN occupation of Iraq with radical-sounding denunciations of the Bush administration and its decision to invade and conquer Iraq. At a recent press conference, he called for the impeachment of George W. Bush for violating the US Constitution through an illegal war.

This would perhaps have greater credibility if Nader had not lined up with the extreme right in US politics, backing the impeachment of Clinton in 1998 for the "crime" of lying about a private sexual relationship, and taking a "plague on both your houses" position on the theft of the 2000 presidential election by the Republican Party through the Supreme Court's intervention in the Florida crisis.

Nader contributed to the political climate in which the extreme right first undermined an elected government, then installed an unelected president in a quasi-constitutional coup. In March 2001, he wrote an extremely conciliatory appraisal of the Bush administration for the *Wall Street Journal*, suggesting it was about to crack down on "corporate welfare." He was virtually silent during the invasion of Afghanistan and did not associate himself publicly with the mass protests in the run-up to the war with Iraq.

(The US Green Party, which backed Nader's candidacy in 2000, tacitly supported the 1999 US war in Kosovo, and according to its 2000 platform, declared that the United States "must maintain a viable American military force, prudent foreign policy doctrines, and readiness strategies that take into account real, not hollow or imagined threats to our people, our democratic institutions and US interests.")

While today professing the fiercest opposition to Bush's war policies, Nader does not express himself so strongly in relation to Kerry's war policies, which are virtually identical. When he called for Bush's impeachment, he did not suggest any punishment, political or otherwise, for those in the House and Senate, like Kerry, who gave blank-check authority for Bush to invade Iraq. On the contrary, he evidently believes that a Kerry administration would represent a change for the better in terms of US policies in Iraq.

After downplaying the Iraq war in his hour-long meeting with Kerry May 20, Nader has made repeated references to the issue in subsequent public appearances. However, while it might seem to you that an antiwar appeal must be the central focus of the Nader campaign, this is not how Nader himself views it. For example, in his appearance on ABC's *This Week* program May 23, Nader was asked at one point what his advice would be to Kerry on the choice of a running mate. He responded that if Kerry wanted to appeal to potential Nader voters, he should choose either Senator John Edwards of North Carolina or Congressman Richard Gephardt of Missouri.

Nader was making an evaluation of his own supporters and who would appeal to them. Edwards and Gephardt criticized Kerry during the primary campaign largely from the standpoint of economic nationalism, not the war in Iraq. Edwards repeatedly cited the closure of textile mills in North Carolina and other southern states as a tragedy caused by free trade policies, while Gephardt based his campaign on his opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement.

On the war, Edwards' position is identical to Kerry's. He voted for the war resolution in October 2002, then criticized the Bush administration's diplomacy in the run-up to the war, then voted against the \$87 billion spending bill sought by the White House in September 2003. Gephardt's position is even more reactionary: he played a critical role in crafting the initial war resolution and ensuring Democratic Party backing for it, making an appearance side by side with Bush in the Rose Garden to announce his support for military action against Iraq. He voted for both the war resolution and the subsequent appropriations. He remains today an unabashed supporter of the war.

Nader did not suggest a running mate identified with opposition to the war in Iraq, such as former Vermont governor Howard Dean or Congressman Dennis Kucinich. By his own account, then, Nader views trade policy, not the war in Iraq, as the principal difference between his campaign and Kerry's. And on trade, Nader's policy is indistinguishable from that of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, based on an embrace of American nationalism that is fundamentally reactionary. From an ideological standpoint it is close—uncomfortably close for a Nader supporter like yourself who sincerely opposes the war—to the chauvinism and "America über alles" rhetoric of Bush himself.



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