

Democratic candidate Kerry vows to maintain US troops in Iraq for years

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17 July 2004

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on Thursday, Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry declared that, if he were elected, US troops would remain in Iraq throughout his first term in office—to the end of 2008. The Democratic candidate also suggested that the Bush administration was more likely to withdraw troops quickly than a Kerry administration.

Both the content of the interview and the choice of publication—the *Journal* has been the most vehement media advocate of the war in Iraq and is one of the chief editorial voices of the extreme right within the American political establishment—are politically calculated to send a message. Kerry is reassuring the US ruling elite, including the far-right elements who now back Bush, that he can be trusted to carry forward the US conquest and occupation of Iraq.

Kerry set three conditions that would have to be met for removing US troops from Iraq. He said it was necessary “to measure the level of stability” in the country, “to measure the outlook for the stability to hold,” and “to measure the ability...of their security forces” to defend the country. Until then, he said, “I will provide for the world’s need not to have a failed state in Iraq.”

The main difference between Kerry and Bush on Iraq boils down to Bush’s continued, albeit cynical and false, claim that the US mission in Iraq is to bring “freedom” and “democracy,” words that were nearly absent in Kerry’s discussion with the *Wall Street Journal*.

It is worth noting that the three criteria set by Kerry for success in Iraq would describe the regime of former president Saddam Hussein. All three criteria—stability, lasting stability, and security—would be satisfied by the establishment of a military-police dictatorship headed by a new Saddam, such as the current US-backed prime minister, Iyad Allawi.

Kerry represents that section of the US ruling elite that wants to set aside Bush’s doubletalk about democratization. This was necessary for gulling the American people during the run-up to the war, they concede, but now it is time to get on with their real business, by establishing the security conditions in which American capital can extract profits from Iraq’s huge oil reserves and from lucrative contracts with the US-controlled puppet regime in Baghdad.

As the *Journal* summed up the interview, “Mr. Kerry is

determined to present himself as a leader of strength, one who would more effectively pursue the same goals Mr. Bush has established for progress in Iraq and the broader anti-terror war.”

Much of Kerry’s criticism of Bush was, if anything, from the right. He said that Bush had not consulted sufficiently with the military brass, saying that as president he would “listen to them with greater respect than this president and his secretary of defense did.” He also promised greater success in wooing other countries to contribute troops to the occupation, saying that it would take a new president to repair the damage done to US alliances.

Kerry warned that Bush might attempt a too-precipitate withdrawal from Iraq, which might endanger the new US-backed regime. “I’ve heard said by many people,” he told the *Journal*, that the White House might even withdraw some troops before the November elections, in order to appease the growing popular opposition to the war. “I’m prepared for any political move,” Kerry said. “I’d put nothing past them.”

Though Kerry said the US presence in Iraq was not “an open-ended commitment,” he refused to give any target end date for an end to the occupation. “At the end of my first term I would consider it a failure of my diplomacy if we haven’t reduced the number significantly,” he told the *Journal*, but “I certainly can’t tell you numbers.”

Kerry’s statements are only the most glaring demonstration of a remarkable and instructive political fact. Although the majority of the American people now regard the US invasion of Iraq as a mistake, and well over 40 percent believe that US troops should be withdrawn immediately, the official two-party system has conspired to produce a presidential election campaign in which there is no outlet for antiwar public opinion.

The Republican campaign to reelect Bush is, of course, premised on all-out support for the war and the endless repetition of long-exposed lies about Saddam Hussein’s connections to terrorism and the claim that Bush’s policy of military aggression and preemptive war has made the American people safer.

The Democratic campaign to elect Kerry criticizes Bush’s management of the war in Iraq, but it does not challenge any of the fundamental premises on which the war was based—and

which Kerry himself supported in his October 2002 vote in the US Senate to give Bush the authority to attack Iraq.

As the WSWS has previously explained [see “The rise and fall of Howard Dean: An object lesson in Democratic Party politics”], the contest for the Democratic nomination was carefully managed by the party’s leadership and the corporate-controlled media to prevent the war issue from becoming the focus of the presidential campaign. antiwar sentiment was responsible for the rise of former Vermont Governor Howard Dean to front-runner status last year. Most of Dean’s rivals, including Kerry and his vice-presidential running mate, John Edwards, adapted to the antiwar views of Democratic primary voters as part of their successful effort to wrest the nomination away from him.

The result is that although the overwhelming majority of Democratic voters oppose the war and favor withdrawal of US troops as rapidly as possible, the Democratic nominee and the Democratic Party platform are committed to keeping US troops in Iraq for as long as is required to assure the desired outcome: a stable, pro-US regime that gives American imperialism a dominant strategic position in the Middle East and makes the second-largest oil reserves in the world available to US corporate interests.

The drafting of the Democratic platform illustrates the exclusion of antiwar views. The platform contains 16,000 words and is 35 pages long, but it takes no position on the central political issue confronting the American people. The draft language on the war in Iraq declares: “People of good will disagree about whether America should have gone to war in Iraq.” There is much discussion in the platform about what should be done now—involving the United Nations, bringing in more international support, etc.—but the platform simply declines to comment on whether the war was justified or not.

Instead, the Democrats call for increasing the size of the US military by 40,000 troops, intensifying US support for Israel’s war against the Palestinian people, and maintaining a more-or-less indefinite occupation of Iraq. “We cannot allow a failed state in Iraq that inevitably would become a haven for terrorists and a destabilizing force in the Middle East,” the draft platform reportedly says.

The platform committee rejected language calling the war a mistake and proposing a specific date for the withdrawal of US forces. Supporters of Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who ran as a peace candidate in the presidential primaries, dropped their call for antiwar language and agreed not to press the issue on the convention floor. Kucinich’s representative at the platform discussion, Ana Dias of Hawaii, said Kucinich had instructed her to drop the fight, adding, “We do want to be unified.”

Kerry and his running mate Edwards took a similarly noncommittal position on the decision to invade Iraq in joint interviews last week with several newspapers and on the CBS News program “60 Minutes.” Both were asked whether they regretted their votes to authorize the war, in light of the Senate

Intelligence Committee report that the Bush administration’s grounds for war with Iraq—possession of weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorists—were false.

The Democrats refused to give a straight answer on whether they would have voted for the war, knowing what they know now. Edwards summed up the position by declaring: “trying to go back and reevaluate what we would have done, had we had, hypothetically, had this information or that information, is not useful to us now.”

Adding arrogance to evasion, Kerry told the *New York Times*, “Look, the vote is not today and that’s it. I agree completely with Senator Edwards. It’s a waste of time. It’s not what this is about. We voted the way we voted based on the information in front of us, based on that moment in time. And it was the right vote at that time based on that information. Period.”

Kerry’s open embrace of the war shows the political bankruptcy of the position adopted by many prominent liberal opponents of the war, including *The Nation* magazine and such figures as filmmaker Michael Moore and Professor Noam Chomsky. They present Kerry as a vehicle for the expression of mass antiwar sentiment, despite his repeated and unmistakable declarations that the US must continue the military occupation of Iraq until a reliable puppet regime has been established.

These liberals continue to support Kerry on the grounds that he is the only possible alternative to the reelection of Bush. That no one other than Bush or Kerry will be elected president on November 2 is, of course, true. But that is not an argument for supporting or voting for Kerry. It is an argument for rejecting the US two-party system, which offers such constricted and reactionary alternatives to the American people.

The central issue in the election is the effective political disenfranchisement, not only of antiwar voters, but of the working class as a whole—that is, the vast majority of the American people. Bush, Cheney, Kerry and Edwards are all millionaire politicians, vetted by and dependent on the narrow stratum of millionaires and corporate chieftains who control the two big-business parties and monopolize American political life.

An alternative to the two-party system can develop only through an independent political mobilization of the working class and the construction of a new mass political party, based on a socialist program. The Socialist Equality Party campaign in the 2004 elections—Bill Van Auken and Jim Lawrence for president and vice president, and our congressional and state legislative candidates—provides the means for taking forward the struggle to achieve this historic and urgent task.



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