

Kerry: “I would still have voted for Iraq war”

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The 2004 presidential election contest is unfolding in an atmosphere of political duplicity unprecedented in US history. The war in Iraq is the most burning issue facing the American people, yet both major parties are working to deny those going to the polls in November the right to exert their will or even express their opinion on this bloody colonial enterprise.

Anyone still harboring the illusion that opposition to the war can be advanced through the election of Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry is obliged to give careful consideration to the candidate's extraordinary statements this week.

Speaking in Arizona on Monday, Kerry declared that “even knowing what we now know,” he would still have cast his vote in the Senate to authorize the Bush administration to invade Iraq. “I would have voted for the authority,” said Kerry. “I believe it was the right authority for the president to have.”

The political implications of Kerry's position are staggering. The resolution that both he and his running mate John Edwards supported in October 2002 gave a blank check to the Bush White House to wage war against a sovereign country that had carried out no aggression against the US. This authority was given to the administration on the pretext that Iraq was directly threatening the US.

The key sections of the joint congressional resolution stated that Iraq posed “a continuing threat to the national security of the United States and international peace and security in the Persian Gulf region” because it was “continuing to possess and develop a significant chemical and biological weapons capability, actively seeking a nuclear weapons capability, and supporting and harboring terrorist organizations.”

The resolution continued: “...the risk that the current Iraqi regime will either employ those weapons to launch a surprise attack against the United States or its Armed Forces or provide them to international terrorists who would do so, and the extreme magnitude of harm that would result to the United States and its citizens from such an attack, combine to justify action by the United States to defend itself.”

How can anyone say he still would have voted for such a resolution when the entire world now knows there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, nor any collaboration between the Saddam Hussein regime and the Al Qaeda terrorist network?

The answer is simple: the war was based upon lies, and Kerry, Edwards and other leading Democrats knew it. The fabricated threats of weapons of mass destruction and terrorist connections were concocted not to fool them, but to fool the American people. Leading Democrats such as Kerry and Edwards embraced the Bush administration's lies because they provided them with political cover for authorizing a war of aggression that they themselves fully supported.

Any doubts on this score were cleared up by James Rubin, Kerry's chief national security adviser and State Department press spokesman

during the Clinton administration. For years, Rubin defended economic sanctions that have been blamed for the deaths of half a million Iraqi children, and justified repeated air strikes on the devastated country. Last Saturday, he told the *Washington Post* that had Kerry been president, “in all probability” he would have ordered an invasion of Iraq by now.

Kerry's statement that the sweeping powers that Congress granted to Bush in the October 2002 resolution are “the right authority for the president to have” also bears closer scrutiny. The US Constitution grants the power to declare war exclusively to Congress. By authorizing Bush to launch an invasion at his own discretion, Kerry, Edwards and others in the House and Senate unconstitutionally ceded this power to the White House. In doing so, they implicitly endorsed the administration's doctrine of preemption, a historically unprecedented escalation of US militarism that asserts the right of the US to use military force against any nation that it sees as even a potential threat to its strategic interests.

If Kerry asserts that this is “the right authority for the president to have,” it is because he wants to exercise such authority in a Kerry administration to wage new “preemptive” wars against Iran, North Korea or other countries deemed to be obstacles to US imperialist interests.

The Democratic Party platform already committed an incoming Kerry administration to continue the US occupation of Iraq. Among its main criticisms of the Bush administration was its failure to “send sufficient forces into Iraq to accomplish the mission.”

Kerry has continued to maneuver on the war question, intermittently voicing criticisms of the Bush administration's management of the Iraq war, while affirming strategic goals in Iraq that are indistinguishable from those of the current administration.

In an effort to sustain the illusions of those who still believe his election will help end the US occupation, Kerry said in an interview on National Public Radio last week, “I believe that within a year from now, we could significantly reduce American forces in Iraq, that's my plan.” The statement appeared to be a departure from his earlier assertion that US troops would remain in Iraq at least through his first four-year term, but he and his aides rushed to issue a “clarification.”

“Obviously, we have to see how events unfold,” Kerry said Monday. “The measurement has to be, as I've said all along, the stability of Iraq, the ability to have elections, and the training of the Iraqi security force itself.” He added that his administration could order an increase in the number of US troops. “You'd have to respond to what the commanders asked for,” he said.

The Bush campaign has made the most of Kerry's statement reaffirming his vote to authorize the war. “Almost two years after he voted for the war in Iraq and almost 220 days after switching positions to declare himself an antiwar candidate, my opponent has found a new nuance,” Bush told Republican loyalists in Florida. “He now agrees it

was the right decision to go into Iraq.”

Whatever the campaign rhetoric, the reality is that the war is the outcome of a consensus policy within the US ruling elite. In the wake of the Soviet Union’s dissolution, both parties embraced a strategy based on the use of Washington’s unrivaled military power to secure dominance over the world’s markets and critical raw materials—first and foremost, oil. Control over the petroleum reserves in the Persian Gulf was seen as a means not merely of assuring US energy supplies, but of dictating terms to American capitalism’s principal economic rivals.

Kerry’s statements of support for the Iraq war are not—as some of his left and liberal apologists suggest—the product of a misconceived election strategy aimed at winning votes from Bush. He is directing these comments to the ruling elite, assuring it that a Kerry administration would continue the US drive for global hegemony, but would more competently manage the policy’s execution.

The US war will continue, whether it is conducted by a Republican or Democratic administration. Both parties are committed to a protracted bloodbath aimed at crushing the resistance of the Iraqi people and consolidating a puppet regime—one that hands control over the country’s oil wealth to American corporations and banks.

While polls indicate that fully half of the American population is opposed to the war in Iraq—including a large majority of Democratic voters—the tens of millions who want an end to the killing have been politically disenfranchised. The threadbare slogan of “anybody but Bush” has, whatever the subjective intentions of those who embrace it, assumed the objective political significance of facilitating a continuation of the war and occupation, as well as the attacks on social conditions and democratic rights that are the inevitable domestic counterpart of militarism.

The utter falseness and deception that pervade the campaigns of the two parties have imbued the proceedings with an air of unreality. The two candidates debate a nearly two-year-old Senate vote, while ignoring the daily carnage that is taking place in Iraq. Both parties, along with the media, are trying to downplay the fact that the killing and dying continue unabated.

Given the present rate of US fatalities—an average of two per day—the total American military death toll will pass the 1,000 mark by next month. Estimates of Iraqi civilian dead have been placed as high as 37,000, while scores continue to die and hundreds are being wounded daily in the ongoing US offensive against the southern city of Najaf and the slums of Baghdad’s Sadr City.

The bodies continue to come home, but those who are killed are of little interest either to the major party candidates or the media. The men and women sent to die in a war launched on the basis of lies are drawn almost entirely from the working class, in many cases drawn into the military by the need for a job or money for an education.

Among those killed in the last several days of fighting are young people from all over the country.

Joshua Bunch, 23, an Army Specialist from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, became the 15th soldier from the state to die when his unit was attacked with small arms and grenades in Baghdad August 6. “We’re trying to cope as best we can,” his mother told a local paper.

Henry Shondee, a 19-year-old Army Private First Class from Ganado, Arizona, and Justin Onwordi, a 28-year-old Specialist from North Carolina, were killed when a device exploded under their vehicle on August 2. Shondee was a member of the Navajo nation. “He was like many other kids out there,” said his aunt. “He wanted to use the money from the GI Bill to get an education.”

Onwordi, a Nigerian immigrant, left behind his wife Monique and a baby boy, Jonathan, who was born on July 7 while his father was in Iraq. The soldier’s mother told the press that it was “time for people to pray for peace.”

Armando Hernandez, a 22-year-old Army Specialist from Hesperia, California, was killed August 1 when a bomb exploded near his guard post in Samara. “He said it was dangerous where he was, and that we would have never been able to believe what he has seen,” his sister Delia told the *Los Angeles Times*. An only son, Hernandez helped take care of his mother, two sisters and two nieces. “He was basically like our only man, like the man of the family,” said Delia.

Killed along with Hernandez was Specialist Anthony Dixon, 20, of Lindenwood, NJ. His family said he had joined the military after graduating from high school, hoping to raise money for college. A longtime friend with whom he had enlisted, Adam Froehlich, 21, died in a similar attack in March.

These are the people paying the terrible price for a war fought in the interests of a financial oligarchy. The Bush administration and its ostensible Democratic challengers are agreed that the US occupation will go on and that the useless sacrifice of working class youth in uniform will continue. On this issue, neither party wants any debate, much less a choice at the ballot box in November.

The struggle to end the US occupation of Iraq cannot be waged outside of a break with the Democratic Party and the whole two-party system that is responsible for this war.

The Socialist Equality Party is running in the 2004 election to give voice to the mass antiwar sentiment that has been systematically suppressed by the Democratic Party. We place at the center of our campaign the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and the entire region. We fight for compensation to be paid both to the Iraqi people and the families of those US soldiers killed and maimed in the war to colonize Iraq. We also demand that all those responsible for conspiring to drag the American people into this unprovoked war be held accountable for their crimes.

The SEP’s campaign provides a means not only to vote against war, but to begin laying the political and programmatic foundations for a new, mass political movement fighting to end militarism through the revolutionary transformation of American society.



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