

Bush, Democrats back protracted war in Iraq

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With a substantial majority of the population supporting a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, the Bush administration and its Democratic allies have joined forces in an attempt to intimidate the American people into accepting a protracted and bloody colonial war.

The bipartisan campaign in support of the war was summed up by back-to-back statements from Senator Joseph Lieberman (Democrat of Connecticut) and President Bush, both of them proclaiming a “strategy for victory” in Iraq.

Lieberman’s comments appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* Tuesday, while Bush delivered his in a speech to a captive audience of Naval Academy midshipmen the following day. Both made claims of success for US policy that are wildly at odds with the grim realities in Iraq.

The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, have been thrown into political crisis by the growing realization among broad layers of the American population that the government deliberately dragged the country into a war of aggression based on lies about non-existent weapons of mass destruction and bogus links between Baghdad and terrorism.

The sea-change in attitudes towards the war has been fueled by the mounting death toll of American troops—now standing at 2,110—as well as the exposure of the Bush administration’s criminality, from its indifference to the victims of Hurricane Katrina to the CIA leak case and the expanding web of corruption scandals engulfing the Republican Party.

Opposition to the war has grown as well within the officer corps, which fears that the occupation and counterinsurgency campaign are threatening the US military with disintegration.

This dissension within the top ranks of the military gave rise to the call earlier this month by Democratic Congressman John Murtha of Pennsylvania, a retired Marine colonel and longtime supporter of the Pentagon, for the withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq within six months. The proposal, coming from someone who had supported every US military action since Vietnam, threw the White House into crisis and prompted the latest public relations campaign.

The great advantage that the administration still enjoys is the support for the war from its ostensible opposition—the Democratic Party. The basic unity of the Democrats and Republicans in support of the US occupation reflects the broad pro-war consensus within the financial oligarchy, whose essential interests are defended by both parties.

Those in the political establishment and the top ranks of the US financial and corporate world understood from the outset that the purpose of the war was not to counter a terrorist threat, much less promote “democracy,” but rather to utilize overwhelming American military power to impose US hegemony over a region that contains much of the world’s oil resources. The predominant sections of this ruling elite still see the vast profits and strategic advantages over America’s economic rivals that such control would yield as worth the price being paid in blood—both American and Iraqi—as well as the \$6 billion in monthly war spending.

This is what underlies the bipartisan alliance between the Democrats and Bush in support of continuing what is, in the most profound sense, a criminal war. It also accounts for the indifference of both parties to the antiwar sentiments of the majority of the American people.

This alliance found its most noxious expression in the column written by

Lieberman for the *Wall Street Journal*’s editorial pages, the most consistent voice of the Republican right. Lieberman claimed that “real progress” is being made in Iraq as a result of the US occupation and that the US neo-colonial operation is somehow giving the Iraqi people a “modern, self-governing, self-securing nationhood.”

He repeated the ridiculous refrain that the struggle in Iraq “is a war between... 27 million Iraqis who want to live lives of freedom, opportunity and prosperity and roughly 10,000 terrorists.”

If, indeed, the odds are 27 million to 10,000—that is, 2,700 to 1—why are 160,000 US troops needed in Iraq, and why are they incapable of suppressing the resistance, or even securing the center of Baghdad? Lieberman doesn’t bother to explain this incongruity. Nor does he explain how the “10,000” continue not only to fight, after the US occupation forces have killed or imprisoned many times that number of Iraqis, but have escalated their actions—with insurgent attacks increasing from 150 to over 700 a week in the last year.

He cites opinion polls that supposedly show 82 percent of Iraqis “are confident their lives in Iraq will be better a year from now.” No doubt many Iraqis cannot imagine how things could get any worse.

Lieberman does not mention the polls showing 80 percent of Iraqis wanting US troops to leave the country, nor the recent meeting in Cairo of rival Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni leaders, who drafted a consensus statement demanding the “timetable” for a US withdrawal that both he and Bush claim is unthinkable.

Instead, he chides the American people for giving in to “pessimism” about the war. He attacks some members of his own party in Congress for being “more focused on how President Bush took America into the war in Iraq almost three years ago... than they are concerned about how we continue the progress in Iraq in the months and years ahead.”

How the Bush administration dragged America into the war three years ago is hardly a matter of irrelevant ancient history. The invasion of 2003 was a war crime in the strictest sense of the term—an unprovoked war of aggression, the basic crime on which the leaders of Nazi Germany were convicted and executed. The administration lied about the reasons for the war, attempting to terrorize the American people into accepting it by claiming that Iraq was threatening US cities with a nuclear terrorist attack.

The fact that a war could be launched on this basis, with no real opposition from the Democrats, demonstrates the degree to which the ruling elite is utterly contemptuous of the democratic rights of the American people. No “progress” in any sense of the word can come out of such a criminal and predatory venture, only new and greater crimes.

Lieberman boasted that during his recent visit to Iraq he saw the strategy of “clear, hold and build” at work. “Progress in ‘clearing’ and ‘holding’ is being made,” he said.

The word “clearing” is the English equivalent of the word used by the Nazis, “ausrotten,” to describe their “clearing” of Eastern Europe of Jews and all others who opposed their military occupation. It is a policy of mass expulsions of civilian populations and murderous repression, as seen in Fallujah and elsewhere.

As for “building,” the Democratic senator was compelled to acknowledge that little has taken place as “too much money has been

wasted or stolen.” He delicately avoided specifying by whom, as he would have been compelled to name politically connected contractors upon whom both he and the administration rely for support.

Lieberman’s column amounted to a preview of Bush’s speech the following day, and the president reciprocated by quoting the Connecticut senator approvingly for his rejection of any timetable for withdrawing US troops. He neglected to include Lieberman’s somewhat franker assessment that the US military presence “will need to be significant in Iraq or nearby for years to come.”

Bush reprised the same scare-mongering that was used to justify the war in the first place, equating those resisting the US occupation in Iraq with Al Qaeda terrorists blamed for the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington.

“If we’re not fighting and destroying the enemy in Iraq, they would not be idle,” Bush declared. “They would be plotting and killing Americans across the world and within our own borders. By fighting these terrorists in Iraq, Americans in uniform are defeating a direct threat to the American people.”

This is a boldfaced lie. “Fighting and destroying the enemy in Iraq”—the bombing of cities, the killing of families at checkpoints, the detention and torture of the thousands rounded up and imprisoned at Abu Ghraib and other prison camps—has created an inexhaustible supply of recruits for the resistance. Washington’s claims that those fighting the US occupation are Al Qaeda members who have migrated to Iraq are belied by the failure to capture or kill any significant number of such “foreign fighters.”

Bush spelled out that even if significant numbers of US troops are withdrawn, the war against the Iraqi people will continue. “While our military presence may become less visible, it will remain lethal and decisive, able to confront the enemy wherever it may organize,” he said.

The nature of such a presence was spelled out in detail this week in an article by Seymour Hersh published by the *New Yorker*. Quoting current and former Pentagon and intelligence officials, Hersh writes that plans for a reduction in the number of US troops deployed in Iraq have been coupled with proposals for a more intensive use of American airpower against Iraqi resistance—in other words, a campaign to bomb the Iraqi people into submission.

Already, US warplanes have dropped hundreds of thousands of tons of explosives on Iraqi cities and towns in attacks that are responsible for a large share of the more than 100,000 civilian deaths since the March 2003 invasion.

“The danger, military experts have told me,” Hersh writes, “is that, while the number of American casualties would decrease as ground troops are withdrawn, the over-all level of violence and the number of Iraqi fatalities would increase unless there are stringent controls over who bombs what.”

The proposal to provide US air support for Iraqi army units raises the disturbing prospect of ethnic-based Iraqi units calling in air strikes against political rivals. This is already happening on the ground, as Hersh’s article makes clear.

In his speech at the Naval Academy Wednesday, Bush cited the recent siege of Tal Afar in northern Iraq as a vindication of the use of US-trained Iraqi military forces. “Iraqi units conducted their own anti-terrorist operations... hunting for enemy fighters and securing neighborhoods, block by block,” Bush declared. He quoted an Iraqi soldier as saying, “All we feel is motivated to kill the terrorists.”

Hersh quotes an American Army officer who took part in the assault as saying the predominantly Shiite Iraqi forces were “rounding up any Sunnis on the basis of whatever a Shiite said to them. They were killing Sunnis on behalf of the Shiites.” The officer noted that those doing the killing included a Shiite militia unit led by a retired US Special Forces soldier. “People like me have gotten so downhearted,” the officer told Hersh.

This is the sickening reality of the “strategy for victory” that is advanced by both Bush and the Democrats. It amounts to support for death squads, retaliatory bombing and ethnic cleansing. What is being prepared against the Iraqi people is a mass slaughter aimed at bleeding the country white. Whether this involves the killing of half a million Iraqis, a million or two million, the American ruling elite is prepared to pursue its war crime in Iraq to whatever level is required to suppress opposition to US domination of the country and its oil wealth.

In an attempt to intimidate opposition to the war, Bush told his audience of Navy midshipmen, “When you’re risking your life to accomplish a mission, the last thing you want to hear is that mission being questioned in our nation’s capital.” He continued, “I want you to know that, while there may be a lot of heated rhetoric in Washington, DC, one thing is not in dispute: The American people stand behind you.”

The reality is that the debate in Washington is the palest reflection of the mass opposition to the war among the population as a whole. The Democratic leadership, while raising for its own opportunist and cynical reasons questions about the administration’s conduct of the war, has rejected demands for an end to the occupation.

What passed for Democratic opposition to Bush’s speech came from Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, who chided the president for having “once again missed an opportunity to lay out a real strategy for success in Iraq.”

But for a majority of Americans, as repeated polls have demonstrated, the issue is not a strategy for “victory” or “success.” The issue is bringing the troops home from Iraq. Many millions of people recognize that this war is a crime and are morally outraged by the way it was launched, the continued violence against civilians in Iraq, and the killing and maiming of American soldiers to secure the profit interests of the oil monopolies and the US financial elite.

This vast segment of the American population is politically disenfranchised. Its views and aspirations find no serious reflection within the US two-party system.

The “strategy for victory” promoted by both parties means not only a continuation of the carnage in Iraq, but new wars of aggression to establish the global hegemony of US imperialism. The struggle against the war in Iraq and the new wars that are being prepared can be carried forward only through a decisive break with the Democrats and the building of a new, socialist party that fights for the independent political mobilization of the working class, both in the US and internationally, against imperialism.

This is the burning issue posed in the upcoming 2006 midterm elections. Once again, as in 2002, the Democrats will seek to prevent the vote from becoming a referendum on the war in Iraq. Those who wish to build a genuine movement against the war—one that will force the withdrawal of troops from Iraq—must draw the appropriate political conclusions from the bipartisan alliance of the Democratic and Republican parties.

The Socialist Equality Party intends to intervene in these elections with its own candidates to place before the widest possible audience a socialist alternative to war, social reaction and the assault on democratic rights. It will put at the center of its campaign the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq, and the holding of all those who plotted this war both politically and criminally responsible.



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