

Democrat denounces opposition to Iraq war

What is troubling Joe Lieberman?

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No contemporary US political figure more epitomizes the right-wing, pro-war politics of the Democratic Party than Joe Lieberman. It is no exaggeration to say that the senator from Connecticut is the most important congressional ally of the Bush administration, as he demonstrated again in a column published last week in the *Wall Street Journal*, a day before Bush's speech at the US Naval Academy outlining his "strategy for victory" in Iraq.

Even more categorically than the Republican president, the Democratic senator portrayed the US occupation in Iraq as a war between good and evil, declaring that the US military was fighting on the side of 27 million Iraqis against 10,000 terrorists. Why 27 million Iraqis should need 150,000 heavily armed US troops to assist them in such an absurdly one-sided fight, Lieberman did not explain; nor why most of those killed by the US are innocent civilians, i.e., part of the 27 million, not terrorists.

In another assertion that is wildly at odds with the facts, Lieberman claimed that the vast majority of Iraqis and the vast majority of the US forces in Iraq support the US military occupation and are confident of its success. The only danger, he said, was "whether the American people and enough of their representatives in Congress from both parties understand this."

Lieberman criticized the representatives of both parties in Congress: "I am disappointed by Democrats who are more focused on how President Bush took America into the war in Iraq almost three years ago, and by Republicans who are more worried about whether the war will bring them down in next November's elections, than they are concerned about how we continue the progress in Iraq in the months and years ahead."

This remarkable declaration deserves a closer look.

What are these trifling questions that, according to Lieberman, are distracting his Democratic and Republican colleagues from the greater goal of achieving "progress" in Iraq?

Some Democrats are allegedly too "focused on how President Bush took America into the war in Iraq almost three years ago," Lieberman says.

This complaint grossly overstates the intensity and seriousness of the Democratic criticism of Bush. The Democrats are so deeply implicated in the decision to go to war that they have raised the issue of the Bush administration's systematic falsification of the case for war only in the most timid fashion. There have been no suggestions, for instance, that Bush and Cheney should be impeached, let alone prosecuted for war crimes.

But even the mealy-mouthed criticisms of a Nancy Pelosi or a John Kerry are too much for Lieberman. He clearly believes that the illegal origins of the war are largely irrelevant and have no bearing on its continued legitimacy. In other words, the decision by a US government to disregard international law, defy the United Nations, and launch a war on the basis of pretexts later proven to be false is of no consequence.

It is worth pointing out that it was Lieberman who, in September 1998, gave a scathing denunciation of President Clinton's conduct in the Monica Lewinsky affair. This speech contributed to the political atmosphere in Washington in which the House Republicans could proceed to impeach Clinton for lying about a sexual affair. The senator from Connecticut has delivered no such moralizing sermon against George Bush and Richard Cheney for lying about a war that has cost the lives of more than 2,100 Americans and well over 100,000 Iraqis.

Lieberman also chides Republicans for being "worried about whether the war will bring them down

in next November's elections." Granted, the growing concerns among congressional Republicans relate more to the implications of the Iraq war for their political careers than for the lives of Americans and Iraqis being slaughtered in the conflict. But their posture nonetheless is a response to the growing public hostility to the war, which Lieberman wants to ignore.

Lieberman, like Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, glories in a commitment to hold onto the fruits of the conquest of Iraq—US control of an oil-rich territory at the strategic center of the Middle East—regardless of the feelings of the people to which democratic governments are supposedly responsible. This position amounts to the rejection of any popular influence on US foreign policy, and in effect, a repudiation of democracy itself.

Lieberman's comments give the lie to the official propaganda that the goal of the American invasion and conquest of Iraq is to spread democracy. Instead, the war in Iraq has served to undermine both democratic forms of rule in the United States and any constraints, however limited, that international law placed on the ability of the major imperialist powers to bully and attack smaller countries.

The senator from Connecticut is not an accidental or "fringe" figure in the Democratic Party. He was the party's candidate for vice-president in 2000 and sought the presidential nomination in 2004.

Running as the most openly pro-war of all the candidates for the Democratic nomination, Lieberman was decisively repudiated by Democratic voters. He failed to receive more than 5 percent of the vote in most of the states where he contested the nomination, including his home state of Connecticut, and did not win a single delegate to the party's convention. Nevertheless, his pro-war stance was adopted by John Kerry as the basic platform of the Democratic Party in the 2004 presidential election.

His pro-war politics are not fundamentally different from those of Hilary Clinton, Joseph Biden, and other leading Senate Democrats. On the contrary, as a lengthy account in the December 5 *Washington Post* demonstrates, the entire foreign policy elite of the Democratic Party subscribes to the proposition that an early withdrawal from Iraq would deal a devastating setback to the power and credibility of American imperialism, and must be opposed.



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