

Congressional Democrats on Iraq: New tactics, more war

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5 August 2006

In a letter to President Bush issued July 30, the top congressional leaders of the Democratic Party have pledged their support for an American victory in Iraq, while criticizing the administration's tactics and methods and calling for the "phased redeployment of US forces" to deal with other crises facing American imperialism around the world.

The letter was signed by the Senate and House minority leaders, Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi, by their deputies, Richard Durbin and Steny Hoyer, and by the senior Democrats on the Senate and House committees with responsibility for the Pentagon, foreign policy, intelligence and the military appropriations. The 12 signatures make the document the most broadly based and definitive statement of Democratic Party policy on the war in Iraq.

The basic policy outlined in the letter is identical to that proposed by Senators Carl Levin of Michigan and Jack Reed of Rhode Island in a resolution that was defeated in the Senate in June. The resolution called for the withdrawal of an unspecified number of US troops from Iraq to bases nearby, such as Kuwait, with the first withdrawal by the end of the year. No deadline was set for when or even if the bulk of US forces would leave Iraq, and the withdrawals were predicated on keeping US troops near at hand for a return to Iraq if security collapsed and an anti-US regime seemed about to come to power in Baghdad.

The American media has treated this letter as an effort by the Democrats to make an election-year appeal to antiwar sentiment, and as a shift away from all-out support of the Bush war policy on the part of such notably pro-war Democrats as Congressman Ike Skelton of Missouri, senior Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Tom Lantos of California, ranking member of the House

International Relations Committee, and Senator Joseph Biden, ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

While there certainly is a large measure of political posturing and opportunism involved in the issuance of the letter, only three months before the November elections, any serious examination of its text demonstrates that if the letter is an appeal to antiwar sentiment, it is conducted entirely on false pretenses. The Democrats want the votes of Americans opposed to the war, while the party as a whole remains committed to a military victory of US imperialism in Iraq. The Democrats criticize Bush, but if they were in charge, would carry out a foreign policy along similar lines, based on maintaining US world hegemony through the use of military force.

The main criticism voiced of the Bush administration is that its policy in Iraq is leading to a US defeat, one which the congressional Democrats hope to forestall through a change in tactics. Thus the letter tells Bush that, "your Administration lacks a coherent strategy to stabilize Iraq and achieve victory." Noting the collapse in security in Baghdad which has compelled the administration to send 5,000 more US troops into the Iraqi capital, the letter states: "Far from implementing a comprehensive 'Strategy for Victory' as you promised months ago, your Administration's strategy seems to be one of trying to avoid defeat."

The second major criticism from the Democrats is that the war in Iraq has drastically undermined the ability of the United States to intervene militarily in other crises. The letter observes, "The Iraq war has also strained our military and constrained our ability to deal with other challenges." It points to declining readiness levels in the Army. It calls for a reduction of the commitment to Iraq because this will "allow U.S.

forces to be able to respond to contingencies affecting the security of the United States elsewhere in the world.”

What these other “contingencies” are the letter does not spell out, but the conclusion is clear: the congressional Democrats foresee the need for American military intervention in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, North Korea and other potential battlefields, and believe that Iraq has become an unacceptable drain on the Pentagon’s resources.

The letter accepts as given that the Bush administration began the war in Iraq in good faith, and that its goal in Iraq is a praiseworthy one of establishing a genuine democracy. There is no suggestion that Bush lied to the American people in the run-up to the war, that he cynically used the terrorist atrocity of September 11, 2001 as a pretext to justify war against a country that had nothing to do with those attacks, or that a major purpose in the conquest of Iraq was to seize control of its oil reserves. The word oil does not even appear in the letter.

Nor is there any suggestion that those signing the letter regret any of the atrocities committed by American forces in Iraq, or the massive bloodletting that this war has visited on the Iraqi people. The call for a limited US withdrawal—with no numbers of troops or deadlines specified—is couched entirely in terms of what is best for the United States, not the Iraqi people who are the main victims of the Bush administration’s program of aggression and conquest. The letter declares: “In the interests of American national security, our troops and our taxpayers, the open-ended commitment in Iraq that you have embraced cannot and should not be sustained.”

Rather than express any sympathy for the mass suffering in Iraq, the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and the physical destruction of so much of that country, the Democrats’ letter reveals a resentful and even petulant attitude toward the Iraqis. It criticizes Bush for not demanding enough of the leaders of the stooge regime in Baghdad installed by the US occupation. “Iraqi political leaders must be informed that American patience, blood and treasure are not unlimited,” the Democrats complain. “We were disappointed that you did not convey this message to Prime Minister Maliki during his recent visit.”

A sizeable group of Democratic legislators boycotted

Maliki’s address to a joint session of Congress after he denounced the Israeli bombing of Lebanon and refused to condemn the Hezbollah guerrillas who are fighting the Israeli invasion of their country. Twenty House Democrats sent a letter to the Republican leadership urging them to rescind the invitation to Maliki to speak, writing, “We are unaware of any prior instance where a world leader who worked against the interests of the United States was afforded such an honor.”

Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee and erstwhile “antiwar” presidential candidate in 2004, attacked Maliki for “anti-Semitism” because of his criticism of Israel. He told a business conference in Florida, “We don’t need to spend \$200 and \$300 and \$500 billion dollars bringing democracy to Iraq to turn it over to people who believe that Israel doesn’t have a right to defend itself and who refuse to condemn Hezbollah.”

The letter concludes by rejecting Bush’s policy of “staying the course in Iraq” on the grounds that it is “not working” and “not producing the progress in Iraq we would all like to see.” In this way, the signatories to the letter solidarize themselves with Bush, the greatest criminal of this new century, regretting not his crimes, but the failure to reap the rewards which the Democrats as well as the Republicans hoped to gain from the rape of Iraq.

While Republican campaign spokesmen like Ken Mehlman, chairman of the Republican National Committee, predictably denounced the Democratic letter as a proposal “to cut and run from the central front in the war on terror,” the reality is that the Democratic Party, like the Republicans, is fully committed to the predatory interests of American imperialism. Its differences with Bush are purely tactical.



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