

Democratic Party outlines pro-war agenda for US elections

Joe Kay
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The right-wing, pro-war position of the Democratic Party was on full display Tuesday as the party leadership presented a new report that criticizes the Bush administration for failing to adequately defend the interests of American militarism.

Over the past several weeks, top Bush administration officials have given a series of speeches marking the fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks. These speeches, laced with historical falsifications and other lies, have been designed to intimidate opponents of the war in Iraq, castigating them as appeasers of a new fascist ideology.

The response from the Democratic Party is to argue that they, not the Republicans, are the more consistent proponents of American “national security” and “defense,” i.e., domestic repression and war. From the Democratic Party there has been no criticism of the basic line of the administration, which has used the pretext of the September 11 attacks to escalate a policy of neo-colonialism, particularly in the Middle East. Rather, the Democrats are seeking to argue that they will be better at prosecuting the “war on terror” by confronting supposed threats like Iran and North Korea.

These views were outlined in “The Neo Con: The Bush Defense Record by the Numbers,” written by Sharon Burke and Harlan Geer for an organization called The Third Way National Security Project. The Third Way is a group set up to provide a “progressive” gloss to right-wing policies. Burke is director of the National Security Project and was a speechwriter for the Department of Defense under the Clinton administration.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid endorsed the report—a fact that makes clear that the policy it outlines corresponds to the official line of the Democratic Party. It was

released formally at a press conference that included Reid, Democratic Senator Dick Durbin, General Wesley Clark, and Burke.

The general attitude of the Democrats is made clear from the very beginning of the report, which cites approvingly comments from William Kristol, one of the leading ideological figures behind the militarism of the Bush administration. It quotes Kristol as declaring: “North Korea is firing missiles. Iran is going nuclear. Somalia is controlled by radical Islamists. Iraq isn’t getting better, and Afghanistan is getting worse...I give the president a lot of credit for hanging tough on Iraq. But I am worried that it has made them too passive in confronting the other threats.”

This is more or less the position that the Democrats are staking out. The occupation of Iraq—or rather, the way this occupation is being carried out—is preventing the US government from dealing with more “pressing” problems, particularly Iran. A new strategy is needed in Iraq, the Democrats argue, in order to free the military to deal with these other problems.

“The number of terrorist attacks and recruits are up worldwide,” the report declares, “many of our enemies are stronger; their reach is greater; their weapons of mass destruction are more developed, plentiful and available. At the same time, American influence with our allies has weakened: our ‘friends’ are not with us in Iraq. And a prolonged and troop-intensive war in Iraq has stretched the military and has left America less able to project power in troublesome hot spots than before 9-11.”

On Iraq, the Third Way report highlights the crisis of the American occupation, noting that the number of people killed—both Iraqis and American soldiers—is rising. It declares that Iraq has become a “terrorist haven” that is on the brink of “full-scale war.”

Burke and Geer do not present any alternative to the Bush administration's policy, and do not call for an end to the occupation. The main position being advanced by the Democrats, however, is "strategic redeployment"—the selective transfer of some troops to other areas of Iraq and the Middle East. Other Democrats are floating the possibility of backing a partition of the country, which would lead to violence and ethnic cleansing on a massive scale.

On Tuesday, the Bush administration continued to heighten threats against Iran, releasing a new "National Strategy for Combating Terrorism" that declares Iran to be the "most active state sponsor of international terrorism." In a speech on Tuesday, Bush sought to equate the government of Iran with Al Qaeda and declared, "The world's free nations will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon."

There is every reason to believe that the Bush administration is preparing for some sort of military strike against Iran. What will be the Democratic Party's response? They would lend crucial support to such an intervention. The Third Way report criticizes the Bush administration from the right on Iran, denouncing it for having "outsourced the task of containing Iran's nuclear program to the Europeans and the UN."

The Bush administration "has been unsuccessful in restraining Iran," it declares. "At best, Iran is using its nuclear ambition to blackmail western powers into meeting Iranian demands for economic acceptance and political influence. At worst, it is determined to possess these weapons to establish itself as the leader of the Islamic world."

The report also includes a section on China, in which it states, "We may be losing a potential partner and gaining a serious rival." China has become "a powerful regional power broker, often acting against the interests of America in the areas of North Korea and Iran," as well as South America and Africa. If the US were to take military action against Iran or North Korea and this led to a confrontation with China, these statements are a clear indication that the Democrats would support it.

One of the principal aims of the Democrats is to garner the support of a section of the military that has become increasingly disaffected with the Bush administration, and particularly Defense Secretary

Donald Rumsfeld. Leading Democrats have in recent days renewed calls for the Bush administration to replace Rumsfeld. The disaffection comes from sections of the military brass that are deeply worried that the military as an institution has been severely undermined. Recruitment is sharply down. Morale is at all-time lows. Large sections of the military are committed to the occupation of Iraq, making it difficult for US imperialism to pose a credible threat to other countries.

"Our superiority is unquestioned," the Third Way report declares. "But over the past four years, the President has stretched the military to a crisis point." The report cites many statistics that document this crisis. A new strategy is needed, the authors conclude, to renew the strength of American militarism.

One potential answer to what is seen by the Democrats as inadequate troop strength is the reintroduction of the draft, a possibility that was suggested by Representative John Murtha on Tuesday. Murtha is known for his close ties to sections of the military.

Nowhere within the Third Way report, or in any of the comments of leading Democrats, is there any discussion of the real aims of the war in Iraq and the threats of war against Iran—namely, the seizure of oil and other natural resources to give the American ruling class an advantage against potential rivals, including China. There is no mention of these aims because the Democratic Party accepts them and agrees with them.

The right-wing position being advanced by the Democrats comes at a time when polls indicate that two-thirds of the population is against the war in Iraq. The Democrats are once again demonstrating that they are incapable of appealing to this sentiment. They have no desire to run in the November elections on the basis of antiwar sentiment, since this would create expectations that, being loyal defenders of the interests of American imperialism, they would be unwilling to fulfill.



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