

# Rumsfeld's firing: First casualty of post-election crisis in US

Editorial board  
9 November 2006

The resignation of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is a measure of the acute crisis that has broken out within not only the Bush administration, but the entire American political establishment following the November 7 midterm elections.

At least 29 Republican incumbents went down to defeat in the House of Representatives, decisively shifting control of that body to the Democratic Party. In the Senate, the Democrats have secured 50 seats, and their candidate in Virginia, Jim Webb, holds a slight lead and will likely unseat his Republican opponent, giving the Democrats control of the upper chamber of Congress as well.

The vote, which was an overwhelming popular repudiation of the Iraq war, came as a shock to the political and media establishment. Under conditions in which the population is so alienated from official politics that only 40 percent of those eligible even cast ballots, the sweeping defeat of the Republicans is a pale reflection of the seething discontent that exists throughout America.

While the Democratic Party is the immediate beneficiary of this turn against the war, it neither encouraged such sentiments before the election nor welcomes them in its aftermath.

At a White House press conference called Wednesday to announce the Pentagon chief's resignation, Bush declared, "I recognize that many Americans voted last night to register their displeasure with the lack of progress being made there [in Iraq]." He quickly added, however, "Yet I also believe most Americans and leaders here in Washington from both political parties understand we cannot accept defeat."

There is every reason to believe that, far from paving the way to an end of the war in Iraq, Tuesday's vote and the subsequent shakeup within the Bush cabinet will lead to another escalation of the slaughter.

The removal of Rumsfeld, the acerbic architect of the Iraq invasion, is part of an attempt to craft a new bipartisan plan for continuing the war and the global campaign of American militarism that is being carried out under the mantle of the "war on terror."

In a White House ceremony accepting Rumsfeld's resignation and introducing his replacement, former CIA director Robert Gates, Bush left no doubt that the fundamental policy of the administration remains unchanged.

"America remains a nation at war," he declared. "We must stay on the offense and bring our enemies to justice before they hurt us again."

Gates echoed this twisted and lying rationale for an unprovoked war of aggression. "The United States is at war, in Iraq and Afghanistan," he declared. "We're fighting against terrorism worldwide."

In nominating Gates, Bush praised the career CIA official as

someone who "understands the challenges we face in Afghanistan" because of the role he played as Reagan's deputy director of the CIA when he "helped lead America's efforts to drive Soviet forces from Afghanistan."

In other words, he is one of the American intelligence officials who established intimate ties with Osama bin Laden during the CIA-backed war that shattered Afghan society. As such, he played a role in fostering the very Islamist terrorists who ultimately carried out 9/11. Nothing could express more starkly the cynicism of America's ruling elite than Bush's touting such a record as a qualification for leading the "war on terror."

Gates's ties to terrorism do not end with bin Laden. In the mid-1980s he was tied to the network of White House operatives and CIA agents who organized the "Iran-contra" operation, in which covert arms sales to Iran were used to provide illegal funding for the US-backed "contra" terror war against Nicaragua. He has likewise been linked to covert efforts in the 1980s to supply weapons to the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein during its war against Iran.

That such a figure is being introduced as the champion of a "fresh perspective" on Iraq is the clearest warning that even more horrific crimes are being prepared.

Reactions to Rumsfeld's replacement have born this out. Among the first to call a press conference welcoming the shakeup was Arizona Senator John McCain, the leading contender for the Republican Party's 2008 presidential nomination.

McCain declared that Gates's appointment provided an opportunity for "correcting the mistakes of the past." He said that Washington must reconsider "whether or not we have sufficient forces in Iraq to provide the level of security that is indispensable to defeating the insurgency." He added that he would discuss with Gates "the urgent necessity of increasing the size of the Army and Marine Corps."

The appointment of the new defense secretary, McCain concluded, would provide "an opportunity for greater bipartisan cooperation on Iraq policy—for Republicans and Democrats of good will to work together toward securing victory."

McCain said the US would have to "take out" the radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, meaning a bloody assault not only on the militia forces that he leads, but the masses of Shia poor in Baghdad who have grown increasingly hostile to the US occupation.

McCain's prediction that the Gates appointment would facilitate "bipartisan cooperation" found quick confirmation. Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid of Nevada declared, "By accepting the secretary of defense's resignation, President Bush has taken a step in the right direction."

New York Senator Charles Schumer, who headed the Democratic

Senate campaign, echoed these sentiments, saying, “The nomination of a new Department of Defense secretary is a good first step, and we hope it is a sign that the president is looking toward a new course of action in Iraq.”

The praise for Bush’s action came in the wake of a series of statements by Democratic leaders pledging collaboration with the Bush White House. Incoming Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi vowed that the Democrats would pursue “partnership with the president and the Republicans in Congress, and not partisanship.”

Gates is a member of Iraq Study Group, the bipartisan panel headed by former Republican Secretary of State James Baker and former Democratic congressional leader Lee Hamilton. This panel will soon issue its recommendations on how to reverse the US military and political debacle in Iraq. It is widely anticipated that it will urge a more “realistic” approach that jettisons Washington’s pretensions of fostering democracy in favor of an outright military dictatorship over the Iraqi masses.

The bipartisan support for war continues under conditions of deepening crisis of the two-party system. The results of Tuesday’s elections represented not a popular mandate for the Democrats, but a repudiation of policies that the Bush administration has pursued with the collaboration of the Democrats themselves. The election expressed growing popular opposition to the political establishment as a whole.

The rejection of the war at the polls is all the more remarkable since both the Democratic Party and the mass media have sought to suppress all such political sentiments.

The Democrats provided Bush with the votes he needed in 2002 to obtain congressional authority to conduct his war of aggression, and they continue to fund the occupation to the tune of \$2 billion a week. Likewise, the attacks on democratic rights contained in such legislation as the Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act have been carried out with the support of the Democrats.

Under these conditions, the removal of Rumsfeld is little more than window-dressing. Any expectations that such personnel changes or the assumption of leadership by the Democrats in Congress will lead to an end of the war are entirely misplaced.

The popular opposition to the war expressed in the election is not directed against the Bush administration’s mismanagement of the operation. It is a repudiation of the war’s legitimacy. The majority of the people want an end to a war that they see as both wrong and unnecessary.

Within the ruling elite, however, concern over the Iraq war has a diametrically opposed content. The ruling elite that controls both parties sees “success” in Iraq as absolutely essential. It is a matter not only of the profits to be derived from seizing control of the country’s oil reserves, but of defending the hegemonic position of US imperialism worldwide.

Whatever the tactical differences of the Democrats with the Bush administration’s Iraq policy, it can be safely predicted that the party will offer no opposition to an escalation of the bloodbath against the Iraqi people. No leading Democratic official protested the savage siege against the Iraqi city of Fallujah launched in the immediate aftermath of the 2004 election. If the Pentagon launches a long-anticipated offensive against the Shia slums of Baghdad’s Sadr City, the Democrats can be expected to once again give their support.

Within US ruling circles, two concerns are becoming increasingly acute. The first is the desperate situation in Iraq. The second is closer to home—the growing popular discontent within the US itself. The elections are an indication that the right-wing political and media

apparatus that the establishment has utilized to manipulate public opinion has broken down. The media largely failed to anticipate—much less restrain—the immense scale of the repudiation of government policy that took place at the polls.

The great danger is that having dealt the Bush administration an electoral blow, masses of people lack any real political alternative. This gives the administration time to work out new methods of carrying out its policies of militarism abroad and attacks on democratic rights and social conditions at home.

While the Bush White House is publicly extolling the benefits of bipartisanship, there are indications that it is prepared to pursue its objectives by other means. On the eve of the election, Vice President Dick Cheney declared that the Iraq war “may not be popular with the public. It doesn’t matter.” He said that the administration’s policy would be “full speed ahead” for “victory,” no matter what the people think.

Sounding a similar note, the *Los Angeles Times* cited Grover Norquist, the anti-tax crusader who has served as a close advisor to the White House, who said Bush “would now govern largely through executive orders rather than working with Congress on legislation.”

To the extent that popular opposition begins to interfere with the pursuit of its policies, this administration is prepared to adopt dictatorial methods, including the use of police-state repression against those who oppose it.

The elections have placed this government on a collision course with the broad mass of American working people. The Democrats’ electoral gains will not inhibit this process, but rather accelerate it.

The Socialist Equality Party campaigned in the midterm elections on a program demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, the only means of putting an end to the slaughter in that country.

The SEP also advanced the demand that all those who conspired to launch this illegal war—including Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld—be held politically and criminally responsible.

The Democratic Party has no intention of pursuing such charges. In her statement Wednesday, incoming House Speaker Pelosi reiterated her vow that “impeachment is off the table.” This pledge of loyalty comes before any investigations into the conduct of an administration that has committed more impeachable offenses against the US Constitution and the American people than any other in history.

The politics pursued by the Democrats in the wake of their electoral windfall have confirmed the central political perspective advanced by the SEP in the course of this election: the only viable means of waging a struggle against imperialist war abroad and social inequality and attacks on democratic rights at home is the development of a mass independent socialist movement of the working class in opposition to the capitalist two-party system.



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