

Democrats vow to continue funding Iraq war

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Following the release of the Iraq Study Group's report last week, leading Congressional Democrats made clear they intend to continue funding the disastrous war in Iraq to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars.

According to a recent AP-Ipsos poll, a record 71 percent of the US population disapprove of George W. Bush's handling of the Iraq war, 60 percent favor withdrawal of US forces in 2007 (immediate withdrawal was not offered as an option) and only 9 percent believe in an American victory. Yet the Democrats, brought to power in both houses of Congress largely as the result of this antiwar sentiment, have pledged to keep granting Bush's demands for more money for the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As Tom Curry of MSNBC commented bluntly, "Incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had a message Tuesday for voters who elected a Democratic Congress last month hoping it would force President Bush to bring US troops home from Iraq. 'We will not cut off funding for the troops,' Pelosi said. 'Absolutely not,' she said."

Pelosi made the emphatic comment in response to a question from a reporter who asked her if the Democrats in Congress would vote to end funding for the war if Bush refused to change course in Iraq.

She went on, "Let me remove all doubt in anyone's mind; as long as our troops are in harm's way, Democrats will be there to support them, but ... we will have oversight over that funding."

The new Democratic majority leader, Steny Hoyer of Maryland, declared, "None of us want to fail; none of us want to see Iraq as a failure."

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada has already signaled his willingness to go along with Bush's next massive supplemental-budget request, expected to amount to \$160 billion. "We'll see if there's any fluff in it and make sure there's no pet projects," he said recently. "But if it's legitimate, I think we'll have to go along with it."

Having acknowledged their surrender to Bush over the funding, the various Democratic leaders in Congress claimed that their capitulation came with a price. Pelosi asserted that "the days of the rubber stamp are over." And Hoyer argued

that "There may well be attached to this \$160 billion various parameters that the Congress expects to be met."

Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, organizer of the Democratic campaign to win back the House in the recent election, claimed the next war spending bill would be "the turning point for a new direction." According to Curry of MSNBC, Emanuel "said the bill will impose conditions which Bush will be forced to accept if he wants the money, such as a commission to investigate funds unaccounted for or allegedly wasted in Iraq.

"To voters who'd be disappointed because they thought the new Congress would bring the troops home from Iraq, Emanuel gave a tentative answer: 'From now on we are beginning to figure those questions out in the proper way.'"

Even the Democrats' vague threats to place future conditions on Bush were met with skepticism.

Thomas Donnelly, a defense policy expert with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told the press, "They could say, 'We're not going to pay the bills for a force larger than X size,' or 'You can't have this money unless you start withdrawing troops from Iraq.' [But] I think they haven't got the votes or the nerve."

In reality, the Democratic Party has been the Bush administration's accomplice in the war since its leadership voted for the October 11, 2002, resolution authorizing an attack on Iraq. The Democrats supported the colonial-style war then, and they support it now, with whatever qualms and tactical disagreements.

Reid, Pelosi and their colleagues have now excluded the two possible constitutional means of ending the war in Iraq: impeachment of Bush or the cutting off of funds for the war.

Hoyer has even ruled out a resolution encouraging Bush to adopt the Baker-Hamilton recommendations "at least for now" and has indicated that he does not anticipate that subpoenas will be issued to the administration to determine what went wrong in Iraq.

A comment last week in *Roll Call*, the Washington insiders' newspaper, underlined the farcical character of the Democrats' opposition to Bush. After noting that Democrats "privately acknowledge that they will be careful not to go too far in embracing the [Baker-Hamilton] study," because

“they want to make sure that the report ... doesn’t provide cover for the Bush administration over its policies,” *Roll Call* went on to point to “One potential complication for Democrats: Incoming House Intelligence Committee chair Silvestre Reyes (D) supports increasing US troop levels.” That is a ‘complication,’ that one of your leading representatives openly supports an escalation in the death and destruction.

One element within the Democratic Party, more sensitive to popular sentiment, postures as an antiwar opposition. Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts has introduced a bill that would cut off most spending for the war, but leave funds for the “safe and orderly” withdrawal of troops, economic recovery and international peacekeeping. McGovern’s bill has 18 co-sponsors and no chance of getting on the House floor for a vote.

Rep. Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, has proposed that the Democrats vote against the Iraq war supplemental bill when it comes up for their approval next year. He told Curry of MSNBC, “If new members came in here on the expectation that they’re going to help end the war, and then they vote to appropriate \$130 billion, they might find difficulty going back home and explaining that. You can’t simultaneously say you oppose the war and then vote to fund it.”

In a memo addressed to other Democratic members of Congress, Kucinich said, “The voters will not forget who let them down” if Congress votes to keep funding the war.

Kucinich has no support at this point for his proposal. Incoming House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton of Missouri gave the stock response, “My only real comment is you have to support the troops.” Rep. Barney Frank, Democrat of Massachusetts, dismissed Kucinich’s idea as “silly.”

Kucinich points to a real dilemma for the Democrats, but his own position is fraudulent. His and Al Sharpton’s presence in the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination race, as the WSWS observed at the time, was nothing but a “dog-and-pony show.” The pair were tolerated, even encouraged, by the party establishment to boost the credibility of the Democrats as a “people’s party” and fuel the illusion that they represented an alternative to Bush and the Republicans.

In the end, prior to the party’s convention in 2004, Kucinich’s supporters dropped opposition to the right-wing Democratic platform and the Ohio congressman endorsed pro-war John Kerry. “The next critical step we must take is to help elect John Kerry as the next president of the United States,” Kucinich told reporters. “The word is unity. That is the operative word.” Given the opportunity to speak at the

Democratic national convention, a gathering notorious for its patriotism and militarism, Kucinich called on delegates and voters to “blaze a new path with John Kerry and John Edwards.”

Recently, when asked by an interviewer what the election of pro-war Hoyer as majority leader meant for the Democratic Party and the war in Iraq, Kucinich replied, “We’re united behind Nancy Pelosi, Steny Hoyer and our entire leadership team.”

One month after an election that amounted to a repudiation of the Iraq war, what are the prospects for ending it?

The report issued last week by the Iraq Study Group, the bipartisan panel headed by former secretary of state James Baker and former Democratic congressman Lee Hamilton, rejects the possibility of outright US military victory and urges a change in course, including an increased diplomatic and political effort, while maintaining indefinitely tens of thousands of American military personnel in Iraq. Baker and Hamilton speak for a section of the ruling elite fearful of the military, diplomatic and domestic political consequences of a catastrophe in Iraq.

Another faction of the political establishment, represented by Bush, Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board and others, rejects any pulling back of troops, substantial redeployment or a change in the provocative attitude toward Syria and Iran. This group is an authoritative mouthpiece for the most predatory and brutal section of the American ruling elite.

For their part, the leaders of the Democratic ‘opposition,’ Pelosi, Hoyer, Reid and Emanuel, brought to power by the population to bring an end to the war, criticize this or that action by the administration and the Republicans, but, at the end of the day, promise to continue support for the bloodshed and destruction.

None of these elements proposes a rapid withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, much less holding to account those responsible for this criminal war.



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