

Senate committee votes unanimously to confirm Bush nominee for Pentagon chief

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There is nothing ambiguous about Tuesday's unanimous vote, 21 to 0, by the Senate Armed Services Committee to recommend that the full Senate confirm President Bush's nominee to replace Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense.

There could be no clearer demonstration of bipartisan support for a continuation of the illegal US war in Iraq—a fact that will be underscored when the full Senate, as early as Wednesday, votes overwhelmingly to confirm former CIA Director Roberts Gates as the new defense secretary.

Exactly five weeks after an election in which, as even the establishment media acknowledges, the American people repudiated the war and voted to put the Democrats in control of Congress with a popular mandate to end it, senators of both parties joined to stage a political love fest for Bush's choice to prosecute the war to a "successful" conclusion.

This development confirms the analysis that has been consistently advanced by the *World Socialist Web Site* and shatters the attempts by various "left" supporters of the Democratic Party to portray this political instrument of the American ruling elite as a means for opposing the Iraq war and the policies of militarism and social reaction of which the slaughter in Iraq is a part.

More fundamentally, the vote by the Senate Armed Services Committee testifies to the absence of anything that can legitimately be called an opposition party within the American political establishment. A genuine opposition party, in the wake of the popular repudiation of the Bush administration in the November 7 congressional election, would, as a matter of principle, oppose the president's choice to oversee the war.

That precisely the opposite has occurred—and in the most shameless fashion—demonstrates a political truth whose comprehension is the starting point for a serious

and effective struggle against the war in Iraq and the future wars that are already in preparation against other countries deemed obstacles to the global aims of the American financial aristocracy. That truth is the fact that both parties, the Democrats no less than the Republicans, represent the interests of a small and obscenely rich ruling elite—to such an extent that they are incapable of responding, or even making a serious show of responding, to the desires, views or needs of the vast majority of the population.

There is simply no other plausible explanation for the unanimous vote by the Senate committee to confirm a man who, as deputy director of the CIA, was personally implicated in the illegal activities of the Reagan administration that have come to be known as the Iran-Contra scandal. The senators, moreover, voted without dissent for Gates after he told the committee that he opposed any time-table for drawing down US troop levels in Iraq, that "all options" were on the table, including an increase in US force levels, that his perspective was to ensure "success" in Iraq, only after which "at some point in the future" it might be possible to "begin drawing down our forces," and that the United States would "have to have some presence in Iraq for a long time."

Not a single Democrat on the committee challenged this perspective. The only criticisms that were suggested in the question-and-answer period that followed Gates's opening remarks came from those senators who are pushing for a substantial increase in US troop levels, such as Republicans John McCain and Lindsey Graham and Democrat Joseph Lieberman.

Among the senators who lavished praise on Gates for his supposed "candor" and "independence" were the dean of Democratic liberals Edward Kennedy and two soon-to-be-declared candidates for the 2008

Democratic presidential nomination, Evan Bayh of Indiana and the putative front-runner, Hillary Clinton of New York.

Carl Levin, the ranking Democrat on the committee, who will take over as chairman when the new, Democratic-controlled Congress convenes in January, acknowledged that he had voted against Gates's elevation to the post of CIA director in 1991. He had done so because, like Iran-Contra Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh, he believed Gates had deceived the Senate when he denied having had any knowledge of the CIA's secret sales of missiles to Iran and illegal diversion of the proceeds to fund the Contra war against the Sandinista regime—a terrorist campaign that killed tens of thousands of Nicaraguan civilians.

This did not prevent Levin from lauding Gates at the hearing, saying, “Your acknowledgment that we’re not winning in Iraq, frankly, is a necessary, refreshing breath of reality that is so needed if we’re going to look at ways of changing course in Iraq to maximize the chances of success. I thank you for that and the other candid responses that you’ve given here.”

The farcically perfunctory hearing, lasting a mere five hours, and the immediate and unanimous vote to confirm that followed the public session, were carefully staged to demonstrate bipartisan unity. The Senate proceedings, along with the report of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group to be released Wednesday, are elements of an orchestrated effort to fashion a new policy consensus for salvaging the disastrous US intervention in Iraq.

Looming over the hearing was the view, stated repeatedly by both Gates and his questioners, that the situation for the US is dire, and that an outright defeat for American imperialism in Iraq would be a catastrophe of historical proportions. That, all agreed, had to be prevented at all costs.

This firm consensus underscores the fact that, whatever the tactical policy differences within and between the two parties, the Democrats and Republicans, along with the Bush administration and the entire political and media establishment, support the underlying goal of establishing US hegemony in the Middle East and Central Asia and control of the regions' vast oil resources—the real aims of the invasion and occupation of Iraq, as well as the ongoing slaughter in Afghanistan.

What this means for the Iraqi people is clear: More

violence, killing and repression. What it means for the American people is no less clear: more families of soldiers devastated by the loss or maiming of their loved-ones, and hundreds of billions more squandered in a popularly despised war abroad, along with an intensified onslaught on the living standards and democratic rights of working people at home.

The bipartisan unity exemplified at the Gates hearing amounts to a conspiracy not only against the Iraqi people, but also against the American working class.



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