

# Democratic Congressman reintroduces bill for military draft in US

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Charles Rangel, the Democratic chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, reintroduced a bill on Thursday that would institute a military draft for all legal residents of the United States between the ages of 18 and 42.

In his press release announcing the move, Rangel—a liberal Democrat who claims to oppose the war in Iraq—made clear that the central motivation for the bill is to alleviate the strains on the military, which will be further overextended as Bush moves to increase the number of troops in Iraq. A draft would also provide sufficient cannon fodder to use in Iran, Somalia, North Korea or any other country the United States decides to invade.

“The military is at the breaking point with more than 50 percent of our combat troops already deployed in Iraq,” Rangel said. “The question is: where will the additional troops—including those that may follow if the war is escalated further—come from?” He noted that many of the 21,000 additional troops that Bush is ordering to Iraq “are already on the ground in Iraq and will have their deployments extended. Almost 250,000 of the troops currently deployed in Iraq have served more than one tour, and some have been deployed as many as six times.”

Not only is the Bush administration escalating the occupation of Iraq, it is also increasing the threat of military action against Iran, while launching air strikes against Somalia Rangel pointed to these tendencies in November 2006, shortly after the midterm elections, when he said on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” “If we’re going to challenge Iran and challenge North Korea . . . we can’t do that without a draft.”

Notably absent from Rangel’s press release announcing the move was any suggestion that the bill is intended primarily to deter further military action or the

deployment of additional troops in Iraq. This is a rationale that Rangel has advanced in the past, suggesting that politicians would not launch wars if the sons and daughters of the wealthy would be subject to conscription.

Rangel claims to be opposed to the war in Iraq, as well as the plan to introduce more troops. He is attempting to justify his draft bill by couching it in the language of “equality of sacrifice.” The draft is necessary, he wrote in his press release on Thursday, because “if Americans are to be placed in harm’s way, all of us, from every income group and position in society, must share the burden of war.”

Indeed, Rangel’s bill would require that a significant portion of the population take up this “burden of war.” Not only is he calling for a draft of all residents between 18 and 42—an age range that far exceeds previous drafts and would include immigrants as well as US citizens, women as well as men—but his bill would also deny all deferments for college students. This is the product of the recognition that a large proportion of young people of military age are attending college or university.

If such a measure were actually put into law, it would mean something on the order of 100 million people subject to conscription. Rangel’s bill provides that those not selected for the military would be required to carry out some other form of “service,” such as policing or border patrol.

The various demagogic arguments for the draft advanced by Rangel at one point or another are merely covers for policy the aim of which would be to provide more cannon fodder for present and future wars waged by the American ruling elite.

A real campaign against the occupation of Iraq would take the form of a demand for the withdrawal of US

troops. This demand has not been raised by the leadership of the Democratic Party because whatever tactical disagreements they have with the Bush administration, they support the occupation of Iraq and the basic aims of American imperialism. The party leadership, which gained control of Congress on the basis of the enormous antiwar sentiment expressed in the November elections, immediately ruled out cutting off funding for military operations in Iraq.

The question of the draft is the subject of serious discussion within the political and military establishment, though this discussion is occurring largely behind the backs of the American people. When Rangel stated in November that he planned to reintroduce his bill as soon as the new Congress started, his position received prominent media coverage. This was a highly conscious move, intended as a trial balloon to gauge public reaction and prepare the population for the possibility of a draft.

It is the Democratic Party that has particularly been pushing for discussion on the reintroduction of military conscription. Calls for some form of “universal service” were ubiquitous in the policy documents of leading Democratic strategists during the lead-up to the November elections.

While there is enormous concern within the ruling elite over the potentially explosive domestic consequences of a draft, there is equally great concern over the deterioration of the military as a consequence of the protracted Iraq occupation. Volunteer recruitment is down as a result of public opposition to the war, and yet both the Democrats and Republicans enthusiastically support a permanent increase in the size of the military. The military has already been forced to relax its standards in order to meet its recruitment quotas.

The question of the draft will now become an issue for discussion within the political establishment, as it conspires new ways to force the American population to kill and be killed in the interests of the ruling elite.



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