

In defiance of 2006 vote, Bush will escalate Iraq war

The Editorial Board
10 January 2007

With his nationally televised speech tonight, President Bush is preparing a massive intensification of the criminal war in Iraq.

Barely two months after midterm elections that were universally understood as a massive popular repudiation of this war, Bush is set to announce that he is ordering at least 20,000 more American combat troops into the country.

The dramatic shift in policy that is being unveiled by the administration is, even by the standards of American political history, without any real precedent. True, Woodrow Wilson launched the US into the First World War after campaigning just a year earlier on the slogan, “He kept us out of the war.” And Lyndon Johnson, after campaigning as the “peace” candidate in 1964, presided over the massive escalation of the Vietnam War.

Yet, there is undeniably something new in the actions of this president. What is involved is not a potential war, but one that has been waged for nearly four years and explicitly rejected by the overwhelming majority of American people.

The justification and aims of the Iraqi invasion and occupation have been utterly discredited. The reasons initially given for sending in US forces in March 2003 to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein—weapons of mass destruction and supposed ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda—have long ago been thoroughly exposed as lies. They were deliberately fabricated by the Bush administration and then disseminated with the assistance of a compliant mass media with the aim of terrorizing the American people into accepting the war.

The war—itsself a criminal act of aggression under international law—has produced a social and humanitarian catastrophe, while provoking revulsion and outrage worldwide and within the US itself.

Abu Ghraib, the Haditha massacre, the lynching of Saddam Hussein and countless other crimes, most going unreported, have exposed this war as a savage exercise in colonial-style repression. It has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis while leaving over 3,000 US soldiers and Marines dead and over 22,000 wounded, many of them grievously.

In defending its decision to continue and escalate the war, the Bush administration is preparing to recycle its old lies about the Iraqi occupation being the front line in the “war on terror,” while also claiming that Washington is engaged in a noble effort to implant democracy in Iraq.

This so-called “democracy” consists of a country under foreign occupation, which, thanks to the US intervention and policy of divide and rule, has been thrust into a catastrophic sectarian civil war that claims over 100 lives daily, while pushing literally millions of Iraqis to flee their homeland.

To the extent that the Iraqis have been asked, they have repeatedly

expressed in their overwhelming majority the demand that US troops withdraw from Iraq. Hostility to the American occupation is such that one recent poll—cited by the Iraq Study Group—showed fully 61 percent of the population supporting armed attacks on US troops.

In reality, the supposed war for democracy in Iraq has only exposed the collapse of democracy in the US itself, where the American people have been effectively deprived of any means within the existing political setup to realize their objective of ending this war.

During the early days of his administration, President Richard Nixon invoked support from a supposed “great silent majority” in justifying his own escalation of the Vietnam War under conditions of mounting demands for the war to end. The US intervention was to continue for over five more years—at the cost of approximately 20,000 American and over a million Vietnamese lives—before Nixon himself was forced out by impeachment charges and the last American forces were evacuated by helicopter from the roof of the US embassy.

Bush can make no such claim. The majority is not silent. It has spoken at the ballot box, and it wants the war to end and for US troops to be withdrawn from Iraq. In the latest poll conducted by the *Washington Post*-ABC News, six out of ten people said that the war was not worth fighting, 75 percent opposed Bush’s policy in Iraq and only 17 percent expressed support for the president’s proposed “surge.”

Nonetheless, the surge appears set to go forward, swelling the ranks of the occupation force in Iraq. This will be achieved largely by forcing some soldiers and Marines to deploy early and delaying the return home of others. Also contemplated, according to an article in the *Los Angeles Times* Tuesday, is a change in Pentagon policy that would permit sending “the Army’s National Guard and reserve units on lengthy second tours in Iraq.”

As a recent poll conducted by the *Military Times*, the publisher of weekly newspapers for the armed forces, indicated, opposition to the war within the ranks of the military itself has grown sharply, with barely 35 percent voicing support for Bush’s war policy and only 41 percent agreeing with the decision to launch the war in the first place. The escalation proposed by the administration will only deepen the morale crisis of the US military and produce a steady increase in American casualties.

That Bush’s so-called surge will produce a horrific escalation in the violence in Iraq is becoming increasingly clear. On the eve of the White House speech, US and Iraqi puppet forces launched a major military assault on a Sunni neighborhood around Haifa Street in Baghdad, killing dozens of people, many civilians, including women and children.

Thick clouds of smoke rose over the Haifa Street area as US

helicopter gunships and jet fighter planes carried out repeated air strikes on the densely populated neighborhood.

To the extent that a US strategy has begun to emerge, it appears to be a two-pronged offensive aimed first at using American forces to back predominantly Shia Iraqi troops in a campaign to suppress Sunni opposition and complete the already advanced campaign to ethnically cleanse mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods of their Sunni populations.

This would be followed by a US campaign to suppress the Shia militias, particularly the Mahdi Army militia loyal to radical cleric Moqtada al Sadr. Such an operation would see a US siege of Sadr City, the teeming Shia slum of 2 million people, entailing a staggering loss of life as well as a major widening of the war.

Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, who has taken over as the senior ground commander in Iraq, summed up this approach in an interview with reporters Sunday, declaring “You have to go after both Sunni and Shia neighborhoods.”

The complicity of the Democrats

This nightmare scenario is unfolding under conditions in which the American people have been politically disenfranchised and their opposition to the war ignored and rejected. This is not only a matter of the arrogant and increasingly dictatorial methods of the Bush White House, but also the complicity of the Democratic Party, which was the main beneficiary of the antiwar sentiment expressed at the polls last November.

To the extent that leading Democrats have expressed opposition to the surge proposal, its character has been almost invariably unprincipled and duplicitous. No major Democratic leader is demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Rather, they propose various forms of “redeployment” that envision a continuing occupation of the oil-rich country for years to come.

The predominant position in the Democratic leadership and the basis of its qualified opposition to the surge proposal was expressed most clearly in an editorial published by the *Washington Post* Monday opposing Bush’s proposal to increase US occupation forces.

“The constructive alternative to a surge is not the abandonment of Iraq,” the *Post* declares. “Instead, it is the fashioning of a strategy that positions the United States to support the country’s moderate forces over the long term—not just 18 months but the years that may pass before the country can be stabilized.” The paper stressed the need for “achieving a broad consensus on Iraq policy, something that is desperately needed if US involvement—and the painful loss of American lives—is going to continue.”

While verbally criticizing the troop buildup, the Democratic leadership has foresworn the only two constitutional remedies at its disposal to prevent it: cutting off funds for the Iraq war and impeachment of the president.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (Democrat, Missouri) spelled out this policy once again, according to the *Wall Street Journal* Tuesday. “We’re not about to cut off funding for troops,” he said.

In some cases, Democratic leaders have invented constitutional arguments to justify their refusal to challenge the war and its escalation, claiming that the president has the power to do whatever he

pleases in Iraq.

“It’s all about the separation of powers,” Senator Joseph Biden, the new Democratic chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told *Newsweek* magazine. He said he told Bush last month, “This is your war, Mr. President, and there’s nothing we can do to stop you.”

There is nothing in the US Constitution granting the president such unfettered powers, and Congress has repeatedly acted to limit, prohibit or end military action, from the Vietnam War and the passage of the War Powers Act in the 1970s, to the US interventions against Nicaragua and Lebanon in the 1980s, to the first Persian Gulf War and the intervention in Somalia in the 1990s.

If the Democrats bow to such extra-constitutional presidential powers today, it is because they have no interest in ending the Iraq war. They, like the Republicans, are committed to the original aims pursued by America’s ruling elite in this war of aggression—seizing control of the world’s second largest oil reserves and thereby furthering American capitalism’s drive for global hegemony. Like the Republicans, they fear that a US withdrawal from Iraq would represent a strategic defeat for American imperialism, strengthening revolutionary struggles worldwide.

The escalation of the war in Iraq is accompanied by growing threats that Washington is preparing new and even bloodier eruptions of militarist aggression. Just days before Bush’s speech, US warplanes have carried out mass killings in Somalia, while the Pentagon is preparing to send another aircraft carrier battle group into the Persian Gulf in preparation for a possible assault on Iran.

The inescapable lesson of the 2006 election, followed by the approaching escalation in Iraq and the threat of even more acts of military aggression, is that the struggle against war cannot be advanced through the existing political institutions, the two major parties of big business in the US or the attempt to exert pressure upon or protest to them.

The obvious question raised by Bush’s decision to charge ahead in escalating the Iraq war in complete contempt for what the majority of American people think about it is this: whose interests is his government defending in the name of “national security” and the “war on terror.” Clearly, it is the financial and corporate oligarchy that controls both major parties and that seeks to further its monopolization of wealth and power through war abroad and attacks on the social conditions of working people at home.

Bush’s unprecedented actions present a political challenge of a new character. Ending the war and preventing future wars can proceed only through the independent political mobilization of working people against the system that has given rise to these wars. This requires not only mass demonstrations, but the emergence of new mass socialist movement fighting implacably for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and for holding those who launched this war responsible, both politically and criminally.



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