

After House vote on non-binding resolution: Democrats won't cut Iraq war funding

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The US House of Representatives voted by 246 to 182 Friday in favor of a resolution opposing President Bush's decision to send an additional 21,500 troops into the war in Iraq. Although Speaker Nancy Pelosi claimed, "The passage of this legislation will signal a change in direction in Iraq that will end the fighting and bring our troops home safely and soon," the vote is not a step towards ending the war.

The resolution and the three days of debate that preceded its passage are a further demonstration that the Democratic Party shares the imperialist goals of the Bush administration in Iraq, and that its criticisms are entirely on the level of tactics. In a literal sense, the resolution is not an antiwar measure at all, but merely a statement of disagreement with the method chosen by the White House to continue and escalate the war.

The resolution devotes half its 97 words to declaring support for US troops currently occupying Iraq, while stating that Congress "disapproves" of Bush's decision to escalate the war. The resolution neither condemns the ongoing slaughter in Iraq, nor the initial decision to invade and conquer the country. If implemented—rather than contemptuously ignored by the White House—it would leave American policy in Iraq exactly where it was on January 9, the day before Bush ordered the "surge" of additional troops.

The three days of speeches on the House floor included remarks by more than three quarters of the 434 representatives. These comments give a glimpse of the relatively narrow range of opinion within the two big business parties in relation to the Iraq war.

The Republican speech-making was a mixture of McCarthy-style terror-baiting (those voting for the non-binding resolution were supposedly guilty of encouraging Al Qaeda and demoralizing US troops), and taunts against the Democrats for their unwillingness to put forward legislation that would actually compel an end to the war by cutting off funding. Adam Putnam, chairman of the House Republican Conference, noted that the resolution "does nothing to help win the war" and "doesn't do anything to help stop it, either."

Few Republican speakers actually defended the latest White House policy, following the guidelines for the debate spelled out in a leadership memorandum that was leaked to the press. This document was remarkably blunt in conceding the deep

unpopularity of the war and the Bush administration: "The debate should not be about the surge or its details. This debate should not even be about the Iraq war to date, mistakes that have been made, or whether we can, or cannot, win militarily. If we let Democrats force us into a debate on the surge or the current situation in Iraq, we lose."

Instead of discussing the war, much of the Republican response consisted of hysterical abuse. House Minority Leader John Boehner said passage of the resolution would mean that "every drop of blood that's been spilled in defense of liberty and freedom from the American Revolution to this very for moment is for nothing." Sam Johnson of Texas revisited every US military failure of the past 50 years, declaring, "We cannot leave a job undone like we left in Korea, like we left in Vietnam, like we left in Somalia." Virgil Goode of Virginia wallowed in anti-Muslim bigotry, suggesting that the result of the Democratic policy would be to replace the words "In God We Trust" on US currency with "In Mohammed We Trust."

The Democratic speeches were far more restrained, giving little expression to the passionate antiwar sentiments of the millions of voters who went to the polls last November to remove the Republicans from power in Congress. Not a single Democrat accused the Bush administration of waging a war for control of oil resources, or suggested that the White House was guilty of a war of aggression. Only a handful made any reference to the lies about weapons of mass destruction and Iraq-Al Qaeda ties that were employed to "sell" the war to the American people as retaliation for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Instead, the Democrats largely opposed the surge on the grounds that it was unlikely to be successful, while declaring that American troops should not be engaged in policing a civil war in Iraq between Sunnis and Shiites. The quagmire in Iraq was diverting military resources required for other tasks, they argued, whether the "war on terror" with Al Qaeda, propping up the US-backed regime in Afghanistan, or confronting Iran, Syria, North Korea, China and other potential antagonists of American imperialism.

Typical were the remarks of newly elected Democratic Congressman Joe Sestak of Pennsylvania, a retired admiral who commanded an aircraft carrier battle group in the Persian Gulf. He criticized "the continuing use of our national treasure in

what is an inconclusive, open-ended involvement within a country where the long-term benefits do not match what we need to reap.”

Iraq war veteran Patrick Murphy, a former captain in the 82nd Airborne Division, is a newly elected Democratic congressman from the Philadelphia suburbs. He was one of the first speakers in the debate, saying, “Walking in my own combat boots, I saw firsthand this administration’s failed policy. It is immoral to send young Americans to fight and die in a conflict without a real strategy for success.” Presumably, by this formulation, a more successful military strategy would have justified the sacrifice of American (and Iraqi) lives.

The real position of the congressional Democrats is expressed in their flat rejection of any cutoff of funding for the war (to say nothing of filing articles of impeachment against Bush for launching an illegal war on the basis of lies). Speaker Pelosi was adamant that no such measure would be proposed, claiming that to do so would harm the troops now deployed in Iraq.

In a question-and-answer piece published in the *New York Times* Friday, Pelosi declared her impotence in the face of Bush’s determination to continue and escalate the war. Asked whether the nonbinding resolution would have any effect, she replied, “I don’t know that the president can completely ignore us.” Asked if the House debate had moved Bush, she said, “To be honest, I don’t know if the president is moveable in terms of the course of action he wants to take militarily.”

Most significant was her response to the next question, about demands for “an urgent end to the Iraq war and asking Congress to cut the funding immediately. Is that a bad idea?”

“Why would it be a bad idea not to support our troops?” she said—rephrasing a funding cutoff as an attack on the soldiers. “They are in harm’s way,” she continued. “We have to protect them.”

It is a demonstration of the entirely artificial and false character of “official” US politics that sending hundreds if not thousands more soldiers to their deaths is hailed as “support,” while removing them from the battlefield and returning them safely to their families is denounced as “undermining the troops.”

Equally unreal was the policy outlined Thursday by Congressman John Murtha, chairman of the House Appropriations military subcommittee and a leading spokesman for the Democrats on the war. At a press announcement co-sponsored by the liberal group Move-on.org, Murtha announced he would seek to attach amendments to an upcoming Pentagon funding bill to require that all troops sent to Iraq be certified by the military as fully equipped and trained for urban counterinsurgency warfare, and that all soldiers have at least one year stateside in between each deployment to a war zone. In other words, Bush is free to continue sending these soldiers to their deaths. He is merely required to get a rubberstamp from the Pentagon.

The US mass media is portraying the House vote as the first step in a titanic confrontation between the Democratic-controlled Congress and the Republican president. The purpose of such brazen distortions of reality is to maintain the credibility of an increasingly discredited and unpopular political system, in which both of the two official parties represent the financial aristocracy and defend its interests, both at home and abroad.

It is certainly true that the Democrats gained control of Congress because of mass antiwar sentiment. But the Democratic Party is not an antiwar party. It is a pro-war party that has significant tactical differences with the Bush White House.

These differences may well spark serious conflict in Washington, particularly as the Bush administration ratchets up its rhetoric and its provocations against Iran, openly threatening to launch a military strike that would vastly expand the Middle East battlefield, with incalculable consequences. But a dispute over what methods to pursue to best achieve the interests of corporate America is by no means the same thing as a rejection of imperialist foreign policy.

There is an unbridgeable gulf between the opposition to the war in Iraq on the part of millions of working people—who instinctively recognize that the war is being waged in the interests of big business—and the criticism of Bush’s lack of “success” in Iraq by Democrats like Pelosi, Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama.

This gulf is symbolized by Obama’s hasty apology this week after he blurted out that Bush administration had “wasted” the lives of the 3,000 American soldiers killed in Iraq. For any genuine opponent of the war in Iraq, “wasted” is the least that can be said of the tragic loss of life among Americans and Iraqis alike. Those responsible for launching the war of aggression in Iraq—including Democrats like Clinton as well as the Republican cabal around Bush and Cheney—are guilty of the same crime for which the Nazis were prosecuted at Nuremberg.

The struggle against the war in Iraq can only be conducted through an open political struggle against both the war parties—the Democrats as well as the Republicans—and the building of an independent mass political movement based on the working class.



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