

Congressional Democrats embrace Republican resolution on Iraq

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With their endorsement Wednesday of a Republican-drafted resolution pledging to continue funding for the Iraq war, Congressional Democratic leaders have exposed their supposed opposition to the Bush administration's troop "surge" as a rebellion on their knees.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat from Nevada, announced the decision by party leaders to abandon their own toothless nonbinding resolution in favor of an even more innocuous measure introduced by Senator John Warner, a Virginia Republican and former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

On Thursday, Senators Joseph Biden, a Delaware Democrat and chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Chuck Hagel, a Republican from Nebraska, declared that they too would back Warner's measure. The two were sponsors of another resolution more sharply critical of the administration's decision to send 21,500 more US troops to Iraq. The third sponsor of that resolution, Senator Carl Levin, a Michigan Democrat and chairman of the Senate Armed Service Committee, had joined Warner's camp the day before.

Warner revised his resolution to include specific language foreswearing any cutoff of funding for the Iraq war, ostensibly with the aim of attracting more Republican backing. At the same time, the measure does not include language incorporated into the Biden-Levin-Hagel resolution describing the escalation as against US national interests.

The clause inserted into the new proposal reads, "Congress should not take any action that will endanger the United States military forces in the field, including the elimination or reduction of funds for troops in the field."

As a sop to the Democrats, Warner removed one clause that suggested the Senate could give its support for a troop surge of somewhat smaller dimensions.

House Democrat also embraced the watered-down measure, on the grounds that it would garner more bipartisan support. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California instructed committees to draft new resolutions paralleling Warner's draft.

At the same time, she suggested in an interview on National Public Radio that the resolution could be followed by "new initiatives on the floor . . . to drastically reduce the number of troops."

A spokesman for Pelosi's office, however, told the *New York Times* that there have been no decisions to advance any binding

resolutions mandating troop withdrawals.

The Democrats were not compelled to climb down very far to meet Warner more than halfway. In essence, the two resolutions in the Senate were much the same. Neither amounted to much more than political hand-wringing over the plan announced by Bush on January 10 to defy public opinion and the clear antiwar mandate delivered by the voters in last November's election by sending still more troops to Iraq.

Both expressed general sympathy with the main tenets laid down in the Iraq Study Group report rejected by the administration, calling for a greater emphasis on political efforts and diplomacy aimed at winning greater collaboration from other countries in the region, specifically Iran and Syria.

And both made clear that the aim of their criticism was not to demand that Washington halt its illegal war in Iraq aimed at imposing US neocolonial domination over the oil-rich country. On the contrary, both measures are presented as means of continuing this criminal imperialist venture.

Thus, the Biden-Levin-Hagel resolution began by declaring, "United States strategy and presence on the ground in Iraq can only be sustained with the support of the American people and bipartisan support from Congress."

And the Warner proposal states, "the United States' strategy and operations in Iraq can only be sustained and achieved with support from the American people and with a level of bipartisanship."

In summary, in the wake of an election in which the voters overwhelmingly expressed a demand for an end to the war, the principal concern of both parties in the Senate is how to forge a "bipartisan" policy that will allow US "operations" and "presence on the ground" in Iraq to be "sustained."

The Warner resolution—now backed by the Democrats—goes even further, however, in bowing to the inflated claims to war-making power by the White House. It states, "We respect the Constitutional authorities given a President in Article 11, Section 2, which states that 'The President shall be commander in chief of the Army and Navy of the United States;' it is not the intent of this resolution to question or contravene such authority . . ."

The essential reason for this prostration before a White House that is reviled by the majority of the American people lies in the fact that the attempt to conquer Iraq and, more generally, the global campaign of American militarism carried out under the banner of the "war on terrorism," have enjoyed the support of decisive sections of America's financial oligarchy.

Nonetheless, the behavior of senators on both sides of the aisle as these resolutions have been crafted has been marked by grotesque subservience. John F. Kennedy's famous 1956 volume *Profiles in Courage*, dealing with acts of political bravery by US Senators since the birth of the republic could well be followed by a sequel entitled "Profiles in Spinelessness" based on the actions of those now occupying the upper house of the US Congress.

Senator Lamar Alexander (Republican, Tennessee), for example lamented to the *New York Times* that he—like many Republicans facing reelection in the near future—did not know what to do.

"I'm not persuaded that sending 21,500 troops into a civil war in Baghdad is a good idea," he said, "but I haven't found a resolution I can support."

On the other side of the aisle, Senator Jay Rockefeller (Democrat, West Virginia), the new chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, explained to CNN's Wolf Blitzer that he could only support a nonbinding resolution, rather than a measure to cut off funding, claiming that it would "put the Congress on record" as opposing the escalation.

"The American people are already on record as of the last election, but you know, to talk about cutting money right now, they've already sent some of those troops over," he said.

Asked by Blitzer whether the escalation would go forward anyway, regardless of this symbolic resolution, Rockefeller replied, "That's what I believe, yes, but that doesn't mean that I have to be happy about it."

Given the nature of this so-called opposition, the Bush administration's policy of escalating and, according to all indications, widening the war to include Iran clearly has the upper hand, despite its being opposed by the overwhelming majority of the American people.

There is a clear, albeit criminal, logic to the administration's position: American imperialist interests cannot be defended if the US attempt to conquer Iraq is defeated. Therefore, greater military force must be applied with the idea that, if only a sufficient number of Iraqis are slaughtered, resistance will be quelled.

Those in the Democratic leadership opposing the administration advance no clear alternative, while repeatedly asserting their agreement on the essential goals of the Iraqi intervention and with the conception that "failure is not an option." They are against the policies of the Bush White House not because the unprovoked invasion of Iraq was a war crime that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and over 3,000 Americans, but merely because the war was botched and has turned into a debacle.

Consequently, Bush and Vice President Richard Cheney have been emboldened to go on the attack, essentially daring Congress to cut off funding for the Iraq war, while making it clear that the will of the American people, much less nonbinding resolutions passed by Congress, will do nothing to stop them from continuing and escalating the war.

In his confrontational interview with Blitzer of CNN last week, Cheney declared, "We are moving forward. The Congress has the control over the purse strings. They have the right, obviously, if they want, to cut off funding, but in terms of this effort, the president has made his decision."

Bush, meanwhile, pointed to the obvious contradiction between

the nonbinding resolutions opposing the escalation and the Senate's unanimous vote to confirm Gen. David Petraeus as the new senior US military commander in Iraq, after the general had voiced his support for the "surge" policy.

"He [Petraeus] goes up and testified on Capitol Hill; he says we need more troops," Bush told Fox News in an interview. "The fundamental question is, will they back him up? They voted for him; will they back him up? Will they say, 'sure, we'll give you the support you need?'"

Bush is to meet with Republican senators at the White House on Friday, with debate on the new consensus resolution set to begin on Monday. The White House will apparently seek to muster the 41 votes necessary to stop the passage of any critical resolution with a filibuster.

There are indications, however, that the Warner resolution has been discussed with the Bush White House and that the Virginia Republican's intervention may well have been crafted as a fallback position, with the aim of precluding passage of a measure that would more forcefully challenge the escalation of the US war in Iraq.

Asked by a reporter on January 25 whether the administration was in discussions with Warner about "any changes he might make to his resolution that might be more attractive to other Democrats," White House spokesman Tony Snow responded in the affirmative.

"Certainly we've had conversations with Senator Warner," Snow said. "We're trying to take his temperature on what he intends."

There is an air of unreality about the political machinations in Congress, unfolding as they are against the backdrop of steadily escalating violence in Iraq, the "surge" of troops already being implemented and growing indications that the administration is preparing to launch yet another war against Iran.

What they make clear, however, is that there is no way to advance the struggle against war through the US Congress and America's two big business parties. The mass opposition to war that exists must find its expression in the emergence of a new mass independent political movement of working people challenging the entire political establishment and the financial elite that it represents.



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