

Bush vilifies Democrats, vows veto of Iraq war funding bill

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In a bellicose speech delivered Wednesday, on the eve of a Senate vote approving a \$122 billion spending bill directed primarily at funding the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, US President George W. Bush vowed to veto any legislation proposing troop withdrawals.

Insisting that the war in Iraq is being fought to prevent new terrorist attacks on the US, and that “if we leave Iraq before the job is done, the enemy will follow us here,” Bush stopped just short of accusing the Democratic congressional leadership of treason and aiding terrorism.

The US president delivered his address to the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), a lobbying group representing big US agricultural interests. In 2004, the NCBA endorsed Bush for reelection and directed nearly 90 percent of its political contributions to Republican candidates.

On Thursday, the US Senate cast its final vote on the supplemental funding bill, approving the measure 51 to 47. The legislation includes over \$100 billion in war funding, plus some \$20 billion more for domestic items ranging from \$1.6 billion for Gulf Coast storm damage relief to \$100 million to pay for security at the 2008 Democratic and Republican conventions.

Approval of the package was a foregone conclusion after the defeat Tuesday of a Republican attempt to strip language from the legislation setting a nonbinding goal for the “redeployment” of US troops by March of 2008.

A similar piece of war-funding legislation was approved by the House of Representatives last week calling for the withdrawal of US “combat troops” by September 2008. Both bills provide ample loopholes to allow the administration to continue the war, and make clear that tens of thousands of US troops would remain in Iraq for the stated purposes of defending US citizens and facilities, conducting “anti-terrorist” operations and training Iraqi security forces.

House and Senate Democratic leaders indicated that differences between the two spending packages would be ironed out in conference committee meetings beginning next week, with a final version to be ready by the time the House returns from its two-week break on April 16.

The actions on Capitol Hill combined with the White House threat to veto the legislation have set the stage for a reactionary showdown over which body is responsible for “withholding support for our troops.”

In his speech before the cattlemen on Wednesday, Bush set out to place blame squarely upon the Democratic-led Congress.

“The American people will know who to hold responsible,” he told his largely sympathetic audience.

Once again he used the speech to invoke the terrorist attacks of

September 11, 2001 as a justification for his administration’s policies of war abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home. “It is a day that our country must never forget,” he declared, “and the lessons of that day must never be forgot.” These he summed up as: “The best way to protect this country is to defeat the enemy overseas so we don’t have to face them here at home.”

The “enemy” that Washington is now trying to defeat in Iraq, however, is the product of Washington’s colonialist occupation itself, which is overwhelmingly opposed by the people of Iraq.

Defending his so-called “surge” of some 30,000 more US troops into Iraq, Bush claimed that the initial escalation of US operations in Baghdad and Anbar Province have produced “some early signs that are encouraging.” As evidence, he cited a comment praising the US surge by “two Iraqi bloggers.”

It was later revealed that the pair had actually written the propaganda piece earlier this month and it had been republished on the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page. Both of them had met with Bush in the Oval Office in 2004.

He also cited a letter from a US Army sergeant claiming that the US operation was “picking up momentum.”

In stark contrast to the claims of success made by Bush and his supporters was the grim picture presented by retired Gen. Barry McCaffrey, currently a professor at the US Military Academy at West Point, who was given full access to US commanders in Iraq during a recent trip and, upon his return, drafted a memo recording what he found.

“The population is in despair,” the former top US commander wrote. “Life in many of the urban areas is now desperate.” He reported 2,900 IED (roadside bomb) attacks on US forces a month, combined with thousands more small arms, rocket and mortar attacks.

McCaffrey added: “There is no function of government that operates effectively across the nation—not health care, not justice, not education, not transportation, not labor and commerce, not electricity, not oil production. There is no province in the country in which the government has dominance.” The police force, he added, “is feared as a Shia militia in uniform which is responsible for thousands of extra-judicial killings.”

The general noted that “The majority of the Iraqi population support armed attacks on American forces,” and that the resistance to the occupation was popularly based, continually growing despite the killing and imprisonment of tens of thousands of Iraqi fighters.

The general went on to describe an American military that is being systematically eroded by the Iraq war, with current levels of deployment “unsustainable.” He warned, however, that a “disaster in Iraq” would “endanger America’s strategic interests (oil) in the

Middle East for a generation.”

This is the reality underlying the bitter political recriminations in Washington. Bush, in his denunciations of the Democrats, is preparing a kind of “stab in the back” explanation for the debacle that confronts US imperialism in Iraq, blaming treacherous politicians for preventing victory.

“Yet at the very moment that General Petraeus’s strategy is beginning to show signs of success, the Democrats in the House of Representatives have passed an emergency spending bill that undercuts him and the troops under his command,” Bush charged. He accused the Democrats of setting “arbitrary deadlines” and requiring that “American forces begin retreating from Iraq ... regardless of conditions on the ground.”

Bush also demagogically attacked the Democrats for including non-military appropriations in the supplemental spending bill, as if this somehow tainted legislation “that’s supporting our troops.” In reality, the administration’s financing of the war through supplemental funding legislation is a means of hiding from the public its real cost, which is now averaging nearly \$10 billion a month and is rapidly heading towards a total of \$1 trillion.

This method allows the administration to treat the war as something “off the books,” not counted in budget deficit estimates or in calculating the impact of tax cuts for the rich. After four years of occupation, the pretense that the war costs are the result of an unanticipated “emergency” is ludicrous. Politically, it represents one more means of consolidating a presidential dictatorship in which Congress—which has willingly collaborated in the process—exercises no control.

Once again casting the dirty colonial war being waged by the US in Iraq as a crusade of good against evil, Bush told the cattlemen, “If we cannot muster the resolve to defeat this evil in Iraq, America will have lost its moral purpose in the world, and we will endanger our citizens, because if we leave Iraq before the job is done, the enemy will follow us here.”

Democrats reacted to the heated rhetoric from the president. “Calm down with the threats,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Democrat-California) said, referring to Bush, at a Capitol Hill press conference Wednesday. “We respect your constitutional role. We want you to respect ours.”

For all the attempts to cast the clash over the supplemental spending bill as a historic showdown between a White House bent on military victory and a congressional leadership determined to end the war, leading Democratic lawmakers have repeatedly stressed that the so-called deadlines in the legislation represent “goals” not mandates, and that they envision substantial numbers of US troops remaining in the country to protect Washington’s interests.

The *New York Times* Thursday came to the defense of the Democrats against Bush’s attempts to vilify them. In a lead editorial, the newspaper condemned the administration for promoting “propaganda aimed at making Americans think there is a debate going on between those who want to win the war and those who want to lose. That’s nonsense, and the White House knows it.”

Indeed, the Democratic Party, no less than the Republican, remains committed to defending the interests of the US corporations and banks in the Middle East and in pursuing the aims that underlay the war in Iraq from the beginning—seizure of oil resources and assertion of American capitalist hegemony worldwide. The dominant section of the party—along with a layer of Republicans—is convinced that the tactics pursued by the Bush administration in Iraq have fundamentally

weakened the US position.

In the end, the most likely resolution of the clash over the supplemental spending bill is a Democratic retreat in the face of hysterical charges that the party’s insistence on including its withdrawal language—not Bush’s veto—is threatening to deprive US troops of supplies and ammunition. It is already expected that the final bill being sent to the White House will be the more watered-down version drafted by the Senate. And there have been suggestions from some Democrats that a presidential veto could result in a “compromise” under which funding would be provided in separate installments, with no goals for troop redeployments attached.

The Democratic leadership’s real attitude toward the war found another revealing expression in remarks Wednesday by former Representative Harold E. Ford Jr., the new chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC).

In his first address to members of the DLC—the most powerful caucus within the Democratic Party, which includes the party’s putative front-runner for the 2008 presidential nomination, New York Senator Hillary Clinton—Ford echoed Bush’s criticism of setting withdrawal dates.

“I think most Americans want to win, they don’t want to see us leave early, and if we leave prematurely, we may create a broader set of conflicts and invite a bigger problem in that region than before leaving,” Ford said.

The DLC chairman called for “forbearance,” proposed talks with Iran and Syria and suggested that “we may end up with a partition-type government in Iraq.” He likewise called for making the US military “bigger and stronger.”

This is the genuine face of the Democratic Party, which is committed to militarism and the ruthless defense of the interests of the American ruling elite, both at home and abroad.

The differences between the Democrats and Republicans over the Iraq war are over tactics, not fundamental imperialist strategy. Underlying the increasingly heated rhetoric in Washington are the immense political tensions that are emerging as the result of growing popular opposition to the war itself, which can find no genuine expression in the policies advanced by either major party.



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