

If elected, Hillary Clinton vows to keep US troops in Iraq

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In a calculated bid to position herself for the 2008 Democratic nomination, Senator Hillary Clinton told the *New York Times* Wednesday that, if elected president, she would keep significant US military forces in Iraq for the foreseeable future.

Based on a half-hour interview with the New York Senator and putative front-runner in the Democratic presidential contest, the *Times* reported that Clinton “articulated a more nuanced position than the one she has provided at her campaign events, where she has backed the goal of ‘bringing the troops home.’”

Clinton told the newspaper that there are “‘remaining vital national security interests in Iraq’ that would require a continuing deployment of American troops.”

The US troops, according to Clinton’s plan, would be used to “fight Al Qaeda, deter Iranian aggression, protect the Kurds and possibly support the Iraqi military.”

They would not, she stressed, be deployed to secure Baghdad or to quell sectarian violence “even if it descended into ethnic cleansing.”

As for Iraq’s importance to US “national security,” Clinton could not have been clearer: “It is right in the heart of the oil region.”

Asked how many troops would be left behind under such a plan Clinton demurred, claiming that she would bow to “the advice of military officers.” Undoubtedly, however, these open-ended missions—securing Iraq’s borders, suppressing resistance, training its military and, above all, assuring control of its oil, not to mention protecting and supporting all those engaged in these activities—would require the permanent basing of tens of thousands of US soldiers and marines in an occupation that would last for decades.

Indeed, as the *Times* notes, Clinton’s proposal closely resembles the position taken by Dov Zakheim, the Pentagon’s comptroller under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. He estimated that such a “limiting” of missions would reduce the number of troops required to 75,000.

The timing of Clinton’s interview was hardly a coincidence. The article appeared the day before the Democratic-led Senate voted on a resolution setting a timetable for withdrawing US combat troops by March 31, 2008. While the mass media routinely referred to this measure as a Democratic proposal to end the war, it fell far short of that.

In fact, as a number of leading Senate Democrats explained, the timetable was a “goal” rather than a legislative mandate backed by the cut-off of war funding. Moreover, like Clinton, the resolution itself clarified that US troops would remain in the country for the “limited” missions of training and supplying Iraqi forces, conducting “targeted counterterrorism operations” and protecting US personnel and infrastructure. Again, these are operations that would keep tens of

thousands of US military personnel in the country indefinitely.

In any case, the Senate failed to pass the resolution, voting 50 to 48 to reject it. The Democrats would have needed 60 votes to overcome a Republican filibuster and pass the measure.

In the end, the Senate approved two nonbinding resolutions—one Republican and one Democratic—declaring support for the troops in Iraq. The Republican version included a clause vowing never to cut any funds for “troops in the field.” Both passed overwhelmingly.

Just hours earlier in the House of Representatives, members of the Appropriations Committee voted 36 to 28 to approve a package—ironically dubbed an antiwar measure—that provides over \$100 billion more to finance the Bush administration’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the escalation announced by the White House earlier this year.

This legislation calls for most US combat troops—again, by no means all—to be withdrawn by August 31, 2008, and sets earlier deadlines if the Iraqi government fails to show progress in key areas, including the passage of a new oil law, allowing US energy monopolies to begin exploiting the country’s vast oil reserves. Like the Senate resolution, however, these deadlines have no force of law, and no teeth should Bush ignore them.

Also attached to the war spending bill are requirements that US troops be fully trained, equipped and rested before being redeployed to Iraq. The Democratic leadership, however, added language empowering the president to waive these requirements as he sees fit, so as not to interfere with the planned deployment of some 30,000 more troops in the “surge” announced in January.

As the Senate vote indicates, the chances of even these empty restrictions on Bush’s power to continue the war passing both houses of Congress are nil. Even if they were to be approved, the Bush White House has vowed to veto them.

The political developments on Capitol Hill, as well as the continued carnage in Iraq itself, are demonstrating the undeniable truth that the massive repudiation in last November’s election of both the Iraq war and the Bush administration’s policies as a whole have failed to change anything.

On the contrary, a vote that represented a popular mandate for ending the war has been answered with the war’s escalation. This is the result of the increasingly undemocratic character of the US government, which openly rejects the will of the people in order to serve the interests of the big oil monopolies, the Wall Street banks and America’s ruling oligarchy as a whole. It is also a product of the complete duplicity of the Democratic Party, which gained control of both houses of Congress on the basis of the antiwar vote, but represents these same interests and is therefore committed to continue

the fight for “success” in Iraq.

In stating her commitment to keep tens of thousands of troops in Iraq if she is elected president in 2008, Hillary Clinton is merely making explicit the real policy of the Democratic leadership as a whole, all of the talk about ending the war and bringing “the troops home” notwithstanding.

This is made clear by the Democratic Leadership Council, the most powerful caucus within the Democratic Party, which recently posted on its web site a statement entitled “Plan B on Iraq,” which ridiculed the demand for a “rapid and complete withdrawal from Iraq” as “Plan Zero.”

In a fairly straightforward passage, the article noted that “many of the ‘deadline for withdrawal’ plans circulating in Congress actually assume we will leave significant non-conventional-combat forces in Iraq for an extended period of time; most have loopholes for changing the withdrawal schedule as necessary.” It continues: “All the focus on deadlines obscures discussion of the need for a smaller, redeployed force with a crucially different but still urgent mission. Those offering plans for withdrawal of ‘combat troops’ need to be much more explicit about the kind of US troops that should remain.”

The DLC suggests that Washington would remain in Iraq with a “counterterrorism force” that “would consist largely of military trainers, special forces, intelligence and logistics.” It adds, “Some experts also have suggested that it help Iraqi forces guard borders.”

The statement adds the following peculiar passage: “In general, our military and diplomatic operations should acknowledge the especially barbaric Sunni insurgent-Al Qaeda tactics in Iraq...”

What seems to be suggested is that the “counterterrorism” actions of the reduced force in Iraq would be directed at aiding the terror activities of the Shia militias and death squads in the sectarian civil war that has broken out in the country, a strategy that some military analysts have dubbed the “Salvador Option,” for its resemblance to the backing for the Central American death squad regime in the 1980s.

This outlook seems to be echoed by Ms. Clinton in her interview with the *New York Times*. At the end of the interview, she brushes aside a question over whether US troops could stand aside in the face of violent sectarian ethnic cleansing operations, declaring, “Look, I think the American people are done with Iraq.”

She continued, “No one wants to sit by and see mass killing. It’s going on every day.... This is an Iraqi problem; we cannot save the Iraqis from themselves. If we had a different attitude going in there, if we had stopped the looting immediately, if we had asserted our authority—you can go down the lines, if, if, if...”

Of course in all of this blaming the Iraqis for the historic catastrophe that the US war of aggression has inflicted upon their country, the Democratic Senator does not raise the obvious hypothetical: what if she and fellow members of her party had opposed the war and refused to vote for the October 2002 resolution granting the Bush administration the power to invade a relatively defenseless country on the fraudulent pretext that weapons of mass destruction and terrorist ties (both nonexistent) posed an imminent threat to the US?

Instead, in Clinton’s view, it is a matter of the Bush administration—which is responsible for the deaths of 655,000 Iraqis, the wounding of countless more and the imprisoning of tens of thousands—failing to “assert our authority.”

There is an obvious reason for Clinton’s refusal to repudiate her 2002 vote to authorize war against Iraq. She is signaling America’s ruling elite that, should she be elected president, she is prepared to carry out even more horrendous crimes against the Iraqi people and to

launch future wars of aggression against other countries in order to assert US hegemony and seize control of vital resources and markets.

No doubt Ms. Clinton has been counseled by her husband in this matter. Bill Clinton is the recognized master of the cynical political technique of triangulation—choosing a middle position between that of your right-wing supporters and the sentiments of your liberal backers. He would advise his wife that, while criticizing the Bush administration’s handling of the war, she should deliberately distance herself from those Democrats seeking to identify themselves with mass antiwar sentiments.

According to this political logic—confirmed in spades by the 2004 election—the base of the Democratic party may respond to antiwar demagoguery in the course of the primaries, but in the end the party leadership will nominate a candidate acceptable to the big moneyed interests that control it and that support the essential aims of the US intervention in Iraq. The even more cynical corollary to this approach is the conception that, when all is said and done, the Democrats’ liberal, antiwar constituency will vote for Clinton anyway in a contest against a Republican. “Where else are they going to go?”

The four-and-a-half months since the midterm elections have amply demonstrated that a genuine struggle against the war in Iraq can be waged only by breaking with the Democratic Party of Clinton as well as with the Bush administration.

The war cannot be ended by means of pressure on the existing political parties and state institutions of the US establishment. It requires the emergence of a new independent mass movement of workers and youth fighting internationally for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops and for holding all those who conspired to launch this war politically and criminally accountable. This is the crucial importance of the Emergency Conference against War on March 31 and April 1 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, called by the International Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Party.



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