Democrats drop demand that Bush seek approval for war on Iran

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In one more retreat before the Bush administration, the Democratic Party leadership in the US House of Representatives agreed to strike a provision it had attached to the supplementary funding bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan requiring congressional approval before a new war could be launched against Iran.

According to a report published by the Associated Press, "Conservative Democrats as well as lawmakers concerned about the possible impact on Israel had argued for the change in strategy."

House Democrats had sought to include the language in the $100 billion "emergency" war-funding bill. They have also sought to attach a toothless provision calling for withdrawal of US combat troops by September 1, 2008. This has been included in order to allow the Democrats to posture as critics of the Iraq war, while voting for a bill that funds the escalation of the occupation.

The Associated Press notes, "The Iran-related proposal stemmed from a desire to make sure Bush did not launch an attack without going to Congress for approval, but drew opposition from numerous members of the rank and file in a series of closed-door sessions last week." The news agency quotes Shelley Berkeley, a Democratic congresswoman from Nevada, as saying that the provision was unacceptable because it "would take away perhaps the most important negotiating tool that the US has when it comes to Iran."

"Several officials said there was widespread opposition to the proposal at a closed-door meeting last week of conservative and moderate Democrats, who said they feared tying the hands of the administration when dealing with an unpredictable and potentially hostile regime in Tehran," the AP wrote.

The incident highlights the utter complicity of the Democratic Party in the war drive of the Bush administration—both in Iraq and now in Iran. It comes after a series of indications that the Bush administration is planning some sort of military intervention against Iran.

The new waves of threats against Iran began with Bush's speech in January announcing plans for sending over 20,000 additional troops to Iraq. Bush accused Iran of providing material support for attacks on US soldiers in Iraq, and vowed to "interrupt the flow of support from Iran and Syria" and "seek out and destroy the networks providing advanced weaponry and training to our enemies in Iraq."

Some Democrats reacted with alarm to Bush's threats, concerned that an invasion of Iran would only extend the debacle in Iraq. Senator Joseph Biden, the Democratic chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, told Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during her testimony in January that if the administration thinks it has "the authority to pursue networks or anything else across the border into Iran and Syria" then this would "generate a constitutional confrontation here in the Senate."

Since then, there have been a series of further indications of planned military strikes of one form or another. In February, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a national security adviser under President Carter, warned in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of a "plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran," in which "some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the US blamed on Iran" could be used as a pretext for US military action against Iran.

This was followed by administration claims that it had discovered evidence that the Iranian government was supplying explosive devices to Iraqi insurgents. Two naval carrier groups have been deployed to the

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Persian Gulf. In an article in late February, *New Yorker* reporter Seymour Hersh wrote that the administration had developed a special planning group in the Pentagon tasked with preparing an attack on Iran that could be implemented within 24 hours.

On March 5, Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies published a draft report, "Israeli and US Strike on Iran: A Speculative Analysis." Cordesman goes through the various options that the Israeli and US military have to attack Iran, the weapons technology the two states have at their disposal, and the pros and cons of different levels of military action. Cordesman has close ties to sections of the political establishment, and the fact that he is publishing a document on military options is a clear indication that discussions are underway for some sort of attack.

Within this context, the Democrats have announced that they will abandon inclusion of language that would require the president to seek congressional approval for an invasion of Iran. This language was never about opposing military action against Iran in itself. Leading Democrats, including presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and House majority leader Steny Hoyer, have repeatedly insisted that no option could be ruled out in dealing with Iran.

In a February 14 speech explaining her support for a Senate version of a provision requiring Congressional approval, Senator Clinton declared, "As I have long said and will continue to say, US policy must be clear and unequivocal: We cannot, we should not, we must not permit Iran to build or acquire nuclear weapons. And in dealing with this threat, as I've also said for a long time, no option can be taken off the table." She urged that any such military action be taken with the consultation of Congress, in order to provide a broader base of support for a war. "If we find evidence of potential Iranian complicity [in supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq], we will take appropriate action, but that requires a partnership to defend and protect America's national security interests between the Congress and the President."

The fact that the Democrats have abandoned even this limited measure is testament to the extraordinarily right-wing character of this political party. In part, it reflects the enormous influence of Israeli interests within both political parties, as indicated by the AP story. More fundamentally, however, the Democrats support the basic aim of the Bush administration to establish US domination of the Middle East. While they may have certain tactical criticisms with how the administration has carried out the occupation of Iraq, or how it is attempting to counter Iranian influence in the region, they are adamantly opposed to any step that might hinder the interests of the American ruling elite.

The Democrats' attempt to posture as opponents of militarism, in Iraq or beyond, is completely fraudulent. Despite having suffered a devastating repudiation at the polls in last November's midterm elections, the Bush administration is on the offensive, knowing full well that the Democratic Party will not present any serious opposition. The administration will get approval for funding of the "surge" in Iraq and is being given a free hand to take whatever action it decides to carry out against Iran.

The complicity of the Democratic Party in the war drive against Iran underscores the importance of the Emergency Conference against War on March 31 and April 1, called by the International Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Party. The premise of the conference is the necessity of building a mass international socialist movement that is entirely independent of these official parties and the whole bourgeois political establishment, including the Democratic Party in the United States. The WSWS urges all its readers to make plans to attend the conference.

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