

Demands additional 8,200 troops, \$3.2 billion

Bush calls Democrats bluff on war funding resolution

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In a provocative challenge to the Democratic leadership of Congress, President George W. Bush announced while still on his Latin American tour that he is sending another 8,200 troops to Iraq and Afghanistan and is demanding another \$3.2 billion to fund the escalation of the US wars in both countries.

“My hope, of course, is that Congress provides the funding necessary for the combat troops to be able to do their job—without any strings attached,” Bush said Sunday at a press conference in Bogota, Colombia. White House officials have indicated that the administration is prepared to veto any version of the \$100 billion supplemental funding bill if it includes language put forward by the Democrats proposing dates for the withdrawal of US combat troops from Iraq.

Bush’s announcement confirmed earlier reports that the administration had decided to send 4,700 more troops to Iraq, in addition to the 21,500-troop buildup he ordered in January as part of the so-called surge, a repressive crackdown focused on Baghdad and the restive Anbar province.

The troops being added to this escalation include support units as well as more than 2,200 military police officers requested by US commanders to act as jailers for the tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians that are to be rounded up in the crackdown by the occupation force.

The surprise in the announcement was the 3,500 additional troops proposed for the intervention in Afghanistan, where the US-led occupation has faced mounting attacks. Bush claimed that these troops would be part of a “training” and “embedding” mission, dedicated to making additional units of the Afghan military and police ready to counter the growing national resistance movement. The buildup in Afghanistan will bring the number of US troops in that country—invaded five-and-a-half years ago—to an all-time high. Part of the increased funding is meant to pay to extend a supposedly temporary escalation of 3,200 troops there “for the foreseeable future.”

In a letter to Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi requesting the additional funding, Bush wrote, “This revised request would better align resources based on the assessment of military commanders to achieve the goal of establishing Iraq and Afghanistan as democratic and secure nations that are free of terrorism.”

Meanwhile, Vice President Richard Cheney backed up Bush’s remarks with a right-wing, witch-hunting attack on the Democratic Congressional leaders, charging them with failing to “support our troops,” and playing into the hands of “the enemy.”

“When members of Congress pursue an antiwar strategy that’s been

called ‘slow bleeding,’ they are not supporting the troops, they are undermining them,” Cheney declared in a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the leading Israeli lobbying organization and a fervent supporter of the Iraq war.

“When members speak not of victory but of time limits, deadlines and other arbitrary measures,” Cheney added, “they are telling the enemy simply to watch the clock and wait us out.”

Despite Democratic control of both houses of Congress and the overwhelming popular sentiment in favor of ending the Iraq war, there is every reason to believe that Bush’s demands and Cheney’s intimidation will be crowned with success.

The Democratic Congressional caucus is engaged in its own internal debate, with the House leadership seeking, apparently with considerable success, to quash attempts by a minority to push for defunding the war and legislation mandating a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by the end of this year.

The *Washington Post*’s Jonathan Weisman reported Sunday on a three-and-a-half-hour meeting held last week between House Speaker Pelosi and between 35 and 40 House Democratic “liberals” to discuss the leadership’s proposal to pass a bill for as much as \$123 billion that will continue funding the Iraq war as well as the escalations both there and in Afghanistan.

Referring to Rep. George Miller, like Pelosi a California Democrat, as the speaker’s “consigliere,” Weissman writes: “Miller’s pitch was blunt: If the liberals team up with Republicans to bring down the Iraq bill, Democratic leaders would have no choice but to come back with a spending bill that simply funds the war without any policy restrictions. It would easily pass with Republican votes and the support of many Democrats.”

This threat, which essentially amounts to depriving House Democrats of any political cover for supporting the war, is apparently having the desired effect.

Representative Maurice Hinchey (Democrat, New York) is quoted as telling fellow members of the “Out of Iraq Caucus” at a subsequent meeting, “If we cannot pass a bill like this [Pelosi’s proposal], the alternative is far worse, a straightforward ‘Here’s the money, Mr. President, spend it any way you want.’ This resolution is not perfect, but it’s a hell of a lot better than anything else we can get.”

Similarly, the Associated Press quoted Representative Jerrold Nadler, also an “antiwar” Democrat from New York, as saying, “If you push too far you may get nothing. I’ll be attacked by people at home saying it’s not perfect. It’s not. We don’t have the votes to pass something that’s perfect. It’s the best we can get.”

The “best” the Democrats can get—just four months after midterm elections in which massive popular antiwar sentiment handed them a stunning victory over the Republicans—is legislation that provides more than \$100 billion to continue and escalate the war.

The claims that this measure will somehow compel Bush to end the war are entirely spurious. None of the conditions that are being attached to the supplemental bill would tie the administration’s hands in the slightest. Supposed withdrawal “deadlines” contained in the draft being circulated in Congress are as nonbinding as the symbolic resolution “disapproving” of Bush’s 21,500-troop “surge” passed by the House last month, the same surge that the Democratic leadership now proposes to fully fund.

While the media regularly refers to the legislation as a measure that would “force the withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq by 2008,” it does nothing of the kind. The reality is that the “emergency” spending bill expires in September, long before any of the supposed withdrawal “deadlines.”

Another measure that would supposedly bar the administration and the Pentagon from deploying combat units that have not received sufficient training, equipment and recuperation after previous deployment comes with a guarantee that the White House can issue waivers whenever it sees fit, overriding these requirements.

Similarly, in the Senate, where the Democratic leadership has talked of rescinding the 2002 bill authorizing the use of force in Iraq and setting a March 31, 2008 date for withdrawing US combat troops from the country, leading Democrats have rushed to clarify that this is really merely a suggestion rather than a genuine deadline.

“It’s a goal; it’s not a hard deadline, it’s a goal,” New York Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, a frontrunner in the contest for the party’s 2008 presidential nomination, told the *New York Times*. “We’re just trying to create some pressure on the president. That’s the whole point here,” she added.

The *Times* went on to cite Senator Evan Bayh (Democrat, Indiana) as asserting that the Senate Democrats’ proposed withdrawal date was “a goal with some flexibility.”

This immense flexibility in the spines of the Democratic leaders stands in sharp contrast to the aggressive political offensive being waged by the Bush administration. One would hardly guess from the character of this political relationship that it was the Democrats who won the election last November and the Republicans who lost it, with Bush’s popular support plumbing near-record depths for a US president.

In the end, all of the attempts to explain away the Democrats’ position as a matter of pragmatic politics or an incremental strategy aimed at pressuring the White House begs the real explanation: the Democratic Party, like the Republicans, represents a ruling aristocracy in America that continues to support the original aims of the Iraq war—seizing control of the oil wealth of the Persian Gulf.

Whatever criticism it has of the Bush administration’s conduct of the war or tactical differences over how to extricate US imperialism from the deepening debacle in Iraq, the Democratic leadership remains committed to “success” in Iraq, which means suppressing Iraqi resistance and achieving the objective of establishing US hegemony over the region.

Despite the attempts by the Democrats, abetted by the media, to cast themselves as opponents of the Iraq war, none of the proposals being floated by the party’s leaders in Congress contemplate a complete withdrawal of US forces from Iraq.

As Senator Carl Levin, a Michigan Democrat, told the *Washington*

Post Saturday, the proposal that is being drafted by the Senate Democratic leadership “has the goal, without a fixed date, for the departure of all of the troops that are not needed for the limited, specified purposes that remain.”

The “limited ... purposes that remain” were described by the *Post* as “security, training and counterterrorism operations.” This would mean that tens of thousands of American soldiers would remain in Iraq, continuing the murderous attacks that have already claimed the lives of several hundred thousand Iraqis and seeking to “secure” US control over the country’s oilfields.

The Democratic-controlled Congress is going to grant the administration well over \$100 billion to finance the escalation of the war in Iraq, all of its hollow antiwar rhetoric notwithstanding. A debate and vote on the funding could come in the House as early as next week.

What this money will pay for is a savage intensification of the repression of the Iraqi people. This was made clear by a chilling article in the *Wall Street Journal* Monday, which detailed a raid conducted by elements of the 82nd Airborne Division against an Iraqi village near the city of Tikrit last week.

The account given by the *Journal* indicates that the raid, which involved three helicopters and more than a dozen Humvees, amounted to an exercise in targeted assassination, designed to “capture or kill four midlevel” members of the resistance whom an informer had identified as living in the village.

It describes US troops having “broken into the houses and subdued the men they found inside.” It adds, “In the targeted houses, the Iraqis had been separated by age and gender.” The men were forced to their knees, blindfolded and bound with plastic handcuffs. An officer wrote numbers on their foreheads to make it easier to process them as prisoners.

In the end, the *Journal* reports, the US unit came to the realization that it had raided the wrong village. Significantly, the botched raid was part of something the military has dubbed “Operation Phoenix,” the same name given to the assassination program conducted by the US military and the CIA during the Vietnam War in which between 20,000 and 40,000 Vietnamese were murdered.



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