

# Behind Washington “showdown” on Iraq: Democrats to fully fund the war

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4 April 2007

As the Bush administration ratchets up its rhetoric against congressional legislation proposing a timetable for the partial withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, Democratic leaders are making it clear that, in the end, the Pentagon will receive full funding to continue and escalate the war.

Bush called a morning press conference in the White House Rose Garden Tuesday to denounce the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate for acting to “undercut the troops” and for “substituting the judgment of politicians in Washington for the judgment of our commanders on the ground.”

He vowed to veto the legislation and predicted that his veto would be sustained by Congress.

Bush placed the onus on Congress for his own threatened veto of legislation that already includes more than \$100 billion to pay for the ongoing war and the escalation now being carried out with the deployment of an additional 30,000 soldiers and marines in Baghdad and Anbar province. He then claimed that unless a bill was approved by mid-April, drastic consequences would ensue for US troops in Iraq. According to the president, these include curtailing the repair of equipment and the training of units destined for deployment in Iraq.

“The bottom line is this: Congress’ failure to fund our troops on the front lines will mean that some of our military families could wait longer for their loved ones to return from the front lines, and others could see their loved ones headed back to the war sooner than they need to,” Bush said.

What hypocrisy! Behind its shopworn “support our troops” rhetoric, the Bush administration’s policy in Iraq has already led to what many in the military itself are warning is the destruction of the US Army under the impact of ever-more frequent deployments to occupied Iraq.

On the day Bush delivered his speech, the Pentagon reported that the normal one-year leave in the US between deployments, for purposes of training, re-equipment and recuperation, is being cut short for two more US Army units returning to Iraq as part of the “surge” ordered by the White House.

The strain on troops has reached the point where retired Maj. Gen. Robert Scales, a former commander of the Army War College and advisor to former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, last week wrote an op-ed piece for the right-wing daily, the *Washington Times*, entitled, “Is the Army Headed for Collapse?” In his piece he essentially answered in the affirmative.

“If you haven’t heard the news, I’m afraid your Army is broken,

a victim of too many missions for too few soldiers for too long,” he began, going on to describe the multiple deployments of US units to Iraq, the downgrading of training, and the exodus of a growing number of officers and non-commissioned officers from the military.

Money is not the problem, and no amount of new funding will change this reality. Indeed, according to a report released last Friday by the non-partisan Congressional Research Service, the Pentagon has ample funds to continue the war in Iraq “through most of July 2007.”

While both sides invoke the well-being of the approximately 150,000 US military personnel currently occupying Iraq as the principal motive underlying the decision to appropriate another \$100 billion for the war, the troops—some 30,000 of whom have been killed or wounded—are their least concern.

Amid his repeated invocations of the September 11 attacks and the supposed omnipresent threat of new terrorist attacks, Bush touched briefly in his press conference on what are the real issues for Democrats and Republicans alike.

He told the assembled reporters that he had spoken the day before to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The subject was “progress on the oil law.”

According to published reports, US officials have exerted immense pressure on the Iraqi government to push through the legislation, which would allow the signing of oil contracts under extraordinarily favorable conditions for US-based energy conglomerates.

Bush further warned that if the US war in Iraq “were to fail, radicals would be emboldened, people that had been—that can’t stand America would find, you know, new ways to recruit...” Stripped of the fear-mongering, this warning likewise reflects a genuine concern within the US political establishment as a whole: that the manifest failure of the war of aggression in Iraq will undermine the position of US imperialism across the globe, creating conditions for revolutionary upheavals.

These are the real issues underlying the insistence by Bush that failure is not an option in Iraq. And the administration is prepared to sacrifice the lives of thousands more US troops and tens if not hundreds of thousands more Iraqis to pursue its goals.

Behind the supposed “showdown” between the White House and Capitol Hill, the Democratic leadership in Congress shares the same essential concerns and goals as the Republican administration. Its ostensible opposition is determined, on the one

hand, by the growing conviction that the administration has botched the war that both parties supported, and, on the other, by the need to adopt an antiwar pose in an attempt to placate and divert the mass popular hostility to the war, which was responsible for the party's victory in last November's midterm election.

The Democrats in Congress will over the next two weeks iron out in a conference committee the differences between House and Senate versions of the \$123 billion supplemental war-spending bill. It is expected that the process will yield a compromise measure that includes the Senate language proposing a "goal" of withdrawing US "combat troops" from Iraq by March of next year.

Bush has threatened to use his veto power unless both the language on withdrawal and some \$20 billion in non-military spending are stripped from the legislation.

In response to Bush's charges, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada said in a statement: "Democrats will send President Bush a bill that gives our troops the resources they need and a strategy in Iraq worthy of their sacrifices." He added that by issuing a veto, Bush "will have delayed funding for troops and kept in place his strategy for failure."

Implicit in Reid's remarks is the conception that an alternative strategy exists for snatching victory from the jaws of defeat in Iraq. This is the essential content of the so-called "withdrawal" plans advanced by the Democrats. All of them call not for the withdrawal of all US occupation troops from Iraq, but rather the "redeployment" of US "combat troops." They envision tens of thousands of US troops remaining in Iraq for the ostensible purposes of combating "terrorism" (i.e., the resistance of the Iraqi people), training Iraqi puppet forces and protecting US facilities—most important among them, US oil operations.

Over the weekend, a number of Democratic congressional leaders made it clear that whatever the media hype about a historic showdown over the Iraq war, they all recognize that the Bush administration will get its funding for the war.

Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware, head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, appearing on "Fox News Sunday," said, "The bottom line is still the same and, that is, are the troops going to get everything they need." He added, "...you're going to see a little political dance coming up here that relates to a showdown, and the showdown relates not to the money for the troops, because everybody's there, but relates to whether or not the mission should be changed in Iraq in terms of how the troops are used."

Biden said that the aim of the withdrawal goal attached to the Senate spending bill was to send a message to Bush: "Mr. President, get straight on this war. Get us out of the middle of a civil war and do what our troops are supposed to be doing."

Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, a leading candidate for the Democratic 2008 presidential nomination, told the press that if Bush vetoes a bill sent up by Congress, legislators would redraft the measure to provide the money without a withdrawal proposal. No one "wants to play chicken with our troops," he said Sunday. Obama has attempted to posture as an antiwar candidate to draw votes away from his rival for the nomination, Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, who voted to authorize the invasion.

For her part, Clinton urged Bush to find "common ground" with

Congress on the Iraq war by means of "negotiation and compromise."

Representative Charles Rangel of New York—who has postured as a staunch opponent of the war—was asked on NBC television's "Meet the Press" on Sunday if he believed a presidential veto would mean that Congress would cut off funding for the war.

"Oh, no," replied Rangel, who is chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. "Ultimately, politically, we have to give him money."

In another political maneuver, Senate Majority Leader Reid announced that he was throwing his support to legislation sponsored by Democratic Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin that sets a March 31, 2008, deadline for withdrawing combat forces from Iraq, while cutting off funding for their continued deployment there. Like the other Democratic proposals, however, Feingold's bill would provide continued funding for tens of thousands of US troops in Iraq for "counter-terrorism activities, the training of Iraqi security services, and the protection of essential US infrastructure."

Previously, Reid had steered clear of the Feingold legislation. He and the rest of the Democratic leadership feared taking any action that suggested their support for cutting funds "for the troops." His embrace of the bill now is no doubt a calculated attempt to provide the Democrats with political cover for their inevitable climb-down in the face of Bush's veto.

"If the President vetoes the supplemental appropriations bill and continues to resist changing course in Iraq, I will work to ensure this [Feingold's] legislation receives a vote in the Senate in the next work period," Reid said in a statement.

In other words, after voting another \$100 billion to continue the war and its escalation and dropping the pretense of seeking even a partial withdrawal from Iraq, the Senate leadership will schedule a vote on a piece of legislation that it knows will fail in order to allow Democrats to posture as opponents of the war.

This cynical exercise will no doubt receive support and credibility from outfits like [moveon.org](http://moveon.org), the United for Peace and Justice Coalition and other protest organizations in yet another attempt to contain the deepening popular opposition to the Iraq war within the confines of a Democratic Party that supports imperialist aims that underlie the war.



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