

Senate Democrats pledge funding to continue Iraq war

Patrick Martin
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In a declaration of support for an extended and open-ended US occupation of Iraq, two leading Democratic senators told national television audiences Sunday that under no circumstances would the Democratic congressional majority cut off funding for the war.

Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was speaking on the ABC television program “This Week,” while Charles Schumer, chairman of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, spoke on “Fox News Sunday.”

Levin dismissed the statement by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid that he would back a measure to limit war spending after March 2008 if President Bush vetoes a resolution now going through Congress that would set benchmarks for the Iraqi government and threaten a limited US pullout to insure compliance. Reid said he would support the bill introduced by Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin if Bush carried out his planned veto.

The Feingold-Reid bill is a nonstarter, Levin declared. “Harry Reid acknowledged that that’s not going to happen. He has a personal position, which he said was not the caucus position. He was very clear when he joined a bill which would cut off funding under certain circumstances.”

“We’re not going to vote to cut funding, period,” Levin said. “We’re going to fund the troops. We always have.” He added, “We’re very strong in supporting the troops, but we’re also strong on putting pressure on the Iraqi leaders to live up to their own commitments. Without that political settlement on their part, there is no military solution.”

Levin suggested two possible bases of an agreement with the White House after the Bush veto. The bill could retain the proposed benchmarks but drop the threat of limited troop withdrawals to begin next March

31. “If that doesn’t work and the president vetoes because of that,” he continued, “and he will, then that part of it is removed, because we’re going to fund the troops.”

Schumer, the third-ranking Democratic leader in the Senate, said the Democrats would seek to portray a Bush veto as an attack on the troops in Iraq. Describing the supposedly antiwar resolution passed by the Senate in a close 50-48 party-line vote, he said, “In this resolution that we will send the president, we are giving actually even a little more money for the troops than the president has requested. And nothing—nothing—will stand in our way of supporting the troops in every way. But, second, at the same time, we believe very deeply that we need a change in strategy in Iraq. We are now basically policing a civil war.”

Schumer defended the Feingold-Reid bill, noting that “it doesn’t call for the pullout of all the troops.” He explained, “It calls for continued funding even after March of 2008, which is a year from now, for three missions: Counterterrorism, which is what the original mission was to always be, protecting our forces, and retraining Iraqis. And second, we are not going to leave the troops high and dry, plain and simple. Senator Reid has said that. I’ve said that. Every leader of the Democratic Party has said that. But we are not going to abandon our quest to force the president basically to change his strategy. We should not be policing a civil war. We should be fighting counterterrorism.”

These statements demonstrate not merely a capitulation by the Democratic Party leadership to the Bush administration, but a declaration of solidarity with the goals and aims of US imperialism in Iraq. Levin and Schumer are proving that the whole “antiwar” show put on by the Democratic Congress—non-binding resolutions, war-spending bills with timetables and

benchmarks—are an exercise in political duplicity.

The essence of the policy of the Democratic Party is to calibrate its actions so as to provide all the material support required by the US military occupation of Iraq, while giving lip service to the popular antiwar sentiment that handed the Democrats control of Congress in the 2006 elections. They seek to accomplish two critical goals of the American ruling elite: maintaining the US grip on Iraq and its enormous oil wealth, and preventing the emergence of an effective movement against the war, which would of necessity have to break with the two-party system and adopt an independent political course.

All leading House and Senate Democrats have adopted even the language of the White House in their discussions of the emergency funding bill, portraying a vote against the bill as an attack on the troops. Bush, in his Saturday radio speech, demanded that Congress provide the troops with “the funds, resources and equipment they need to do their jobs.”

The Senate Democrats, rather than uphold the constitutional right of Congress to cut off funding and force an end to the war—thus saving the lives of the troops—echoed Bush’s language, declaring, in Schumer’s words, “we are not going to leave the troops high and dry, plain and simple.”

Levin and Schumer’s blanket rejection of a funding cutoff even goes beyond the position of some Senate Republicans. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, for instance, said on one Sunday program that he was not prepared “to withdraw funding at this time.” He added, “But my patience, like many others, is growing very thin.”

The openly pro-war position of the leading Democrats is having an undoubted impact on public consciousness. According to one opinion poll published on the weekend, while 62 percent oppose Bush’s conduct of the war in Iraq, some 57 percent oppose the actions of the Democratic Congress as well, an indication that antiwar sentiment is turning against both parties.

In their comments on the war in recent days, both the Senate Democrats and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have once again embraced the report of the Iraq Study Group, headed by former secretary of state James Baker and former Democratic congressman Lee Hamilton. The Baker-Hamilton report largely slipped

from public view after its major conclusions were rejected by the White House in favor of military escalation, which has taken the form of the “surge” of nearly 30,000 additional US troops into Baghdad and Anbar province.

But in the last several weeks, Hamilton and Baker have both published op-ed columns in major newspapers urging the revival of their bipartisan approach to the war. Baker’s column, published April 5 in the Washington Post, underscored the domestic political dangers and called for using the Iraq Study Group report as the basis for reestablishing a “national consensus” behind the war. Baker stressed in his column that the panel’s report had rejected a “premature” withdrawal of US troops.

Speaker Pelosi cited the Baker-Hamilton report as the justification for her trip to Syria last week, which was roundly denounced by the White House. The Iraq Study Group had recommended a US diplomatic approach to Syria and possibly Iran, in order to enlist the help of these regimes in preventing a complete collapse of the US position in Iraq.

The congressional Democrats, despite at times vigorous criticisms of the Bush administration’s competence in the conquest and occupation of Iraq, have embraced all the political assumptions underlying the White House justification for its war of aggression. The “benchmarks” incorporated into the House and Senate bills providing emergency funding for the war are those already proposed by the Bush administration. They include—of central importance to the US ruling elite—the demand that the Iraqi government adopt no later than July 1, 2007 a national law permitting the privatization and sell-off of the country’s oil reserves.



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