

House Democrats pass new measure to fund US war in Iraq

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The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives voted by 221-205 Thursday to pass a new bill to fund the war in Iraq, a measure stripped of even the non-binding timetable for withdrawing combat troops that was included in the measure vetoed by President Bush on May 1.

In their ongoing attempt to portray their commitment to fund US military aggression in Iraq as a policy to end the war, the Democrats have retained in the House bill stipulations that the Iraqi government meet certain benchmarks, and that the Bush administration report to Congress on progress in achieving the benchmarks, as a condition for further war funding.

Chief among the benchmarks is passage of a law on Iraqi oil that would open up the country's vast oil reserves to exploitation by American and international oil giants. Other benchmarks concern measures to incorporate Sunni elites into the country's Shia- and Kurdish-dominated puppet government.

The House bill would also limit the war allocation initially to \$42.8 billion, and require another vote in late July to release the remaining \$52.8 billion for the fiscal year ending September 30.

By authorizing only part of the funding now, the bill is designed to placate and divert massive anti-war sentiment by suggesting that the Democrats are considering ending all funding for combat operations in two months. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The latest House measure is part of elaborate maneuvering with the Bush White House which has two central aims: to dampen and contain the growth of popular opposition to the war, and to pressure the administration to alter its tactics in Iraq in the hope of averting a full-scale military and political catastrophe for US imperialism.

Leading Democrats, while calling for a "change of course," have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to maintaining funding for the war and occupation, inevitably presented as a question of "supporting the troops," and made clear that the US military operation in Iraq must continue indefinitely, even after most combat troops have been

withdrawn.

On Thursday, after a meeting with military brass at the Pentagon, Bush reiterated his intention of vetoing the House bill, should it come to his desk. However, he, along with every other political player in Washington, knows that will not happen.

Leading Senate Democrats have already declared their opposition to splitting the war funding request into two parts. "It puts the troops on a very short leash in terms of funding, and I don't think we should do that," said Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin. Senate Democrats are expected to bring their own war-funding measure to the floor next week. The Senate version is expected to be even more toothless than the House version, likely granting Bush the power to waive any benchmarks on "national security" grounds.

Whatever bill goes to the president will emerge from a conference between the two legislative chambers. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California, made clear in a statement Wednesday that, whatever their tactical differences with the Bush administration, the Democrats uphold the basic imperialist interests underlying the invasion and occupation of Iraq. She declared, "When we go to conference, there are certain principles: Supporting our troops, honoring our commitments to our veterans, holding the Iraqis accountable and strengthening our military."

In his statement Thursday, Bush signaled a shift in White House tactics in the wrangling with the Democratic-controlled Congress over a war-funding bill. He said he would open to including "the idea of benchmarks" in such a measure, possibly foreshadowing an eventual compromise.

The Democrats, for their part, are determined to end their maneuvers and grant the administration its funding request by Memorial Day (May 28). As the *Washington Post* put it on Thursday, "Democrats are eager to avoid political pitfalls that could occur if troop funding begins to run out."

The maneuvers over war funding take place under conditions of growing crisis and isolation not only of the Bush administration, but the US political establishment as a

whole. Even as new polls showed rising anti-war sentiment and anger toward Congress as well as the White House, the Pentagon on Tuesday announced plans to deploy ten more Army brigades, some 30,000 troops, to Iraq by December.

Recent opinion polls record Bush's approval rating at 28 percent, and a *USA Today*-Gallup poll published Wednesday reflected a massive rejection of Bush's arguments for the current "surge" of troops in Baghdad. The poll reported that six in ten Americans support setting a timetable for total withdrawal from Iraq, regardless the situation in the country. Only 33 percent would be bothered "a great deal" if the US was viewed as having lost the war in Iraq, while 43 percent would be concerned "not at all" or "not much."

The poll reflected, moreover, anger and disgust toward the Democrats in Congress as well as toward Bush and the Republicans. Only 30 percent supported Bush's policy in Iraq, but the figure for congressional Democrats was only marginally higher, at 34 percent.

Nor are there any serious indications that the current military escalation has dampened the Iraqi resistance to the US occupation. The hatred of Iraqis toward the occupiers and their determination to liberate their country is so great as to find a reflection even in the US-sponsored Iraqi legislature. Iraqi legislators recently endorsed a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops and demanded a freeze on the number already in the country. Drafted by the parliamentary bloc loyal to anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, the proposal was signed by 144 members of the 275-member house.

It is almost superfluous to note that the supposed purveyors of democracy in Washington will take no heed of this vote in Iraq, just as they defy the majority sentiment of the American people at home. It should also be noted that the supposedly "anti-war" Democrats would never pass such a measure.

The ongoing US debacle on the ground in Iraq and the growing popular opposition at home are generating fissures within the Republican Party. On Tuesday, eleven so-called "centrist" Republican congressmen met privately with Bush and other top administration officials in the White House and expressed their fears of an electoral debacle in 2008 if the situation in Iraq does not dramatically improve.

Many of them pushed for Bush to agree to set benchmarks as a condition for continued US military and economic aid to the Iraqi government. This suits the predilection of critics of Bush's war policy in both parties to shift the blame for the catastrophe inflicted on Iraq by US imperialism onto the Iraqis themselves.

Bush's statement Thursday on incorporating some provisions for benchmarks into a war-funding bill was undoubtedly a response, at least in part, to the growing

restiveness within the ranks of congressional Republicans.

Nowhere, in all of the internal disputes and maneuvers within the political establishment, do the sentiments of the broad masses find a reflection. The American people know they were dragged into the war on the basis of lies, they have no sympathy for the oil conglomerates that seek to profit from the theft of Iraq's energy resources, and they are appalled by the toll of the war on both Iraqis and American soldiers.

Nor are the views and interests of the people upheld by the so-called "Out of Iraq Caucus" of House Democrats and their allies in the leadership of anti-war protest movements such as United for Peace and Justice. A *Washington Post* article on Thursday provided some insight into the utterly cynical and hypocritical position of these Democratic "lefts."

Speaking of the new House war-funding measure, the *Post* noted, "The measure initially had been in jeopardy because many liberal Democrats thought the bill did not go far enough to end the war. According to Democratic aides, these members agreed late Wednesday to swing behind the measure in exchange for a vote Thursday on separate legislation that would require troop withdrawals to begin in three months. While that measure is expected to fail, it will give liberal Democrats a chance to express their frustration with the war."

As predicted, the three-month deadline was defeated by 255 to 176, with 59 Democrats joining a near-unanimous Republican bloc. Among the Democrats voting against the proposal was House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer.

While doing nothing to actually hinder the administration's conduct and escalation of the war, the "anti-war" Democrats engage in political posturing and theatrics designed to dupe the masses of people opposed to the war and keep them politically within the safe and impotent confines of the Democratic Party.

Meanwhile, US atrocities against the Iraqi people continue unabated. The *New York Times* reported Thursday, as a mere footnote to its report on Vice President Cheney's trip to Iraq, that the US military command had acknowledged that five Iraqi civilians, including two children, were killed Tuesday when an Apache helicopter fired on a target near Mandali, a town in Diyala. US officials dismissed reports by Iraqis in the area that the Apache missile hit a school.



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