

Democratic Party completes its capitulation on Iraq

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The Democratic congressional leadership on Tuesday formally accepted a supplemental war-funding bill that abandons any timelines for withdrawing US troops from Iraq. The bill further gives President Bush the power to waive economic penalties should the Iraqi government fail to meet a series of “benchmarks” for stabilizing the country and opening up its oil resources to exploitation by American oil conglomerates.

The agreement is a full and abject capitulation by the Democratic Party to the Bush administration. It is the inevitable and predictable outcome of months of antiwar posturing by Democratic leaders.

The terms of the deal were dictated by the White House, working in tandem with Republican Senator John W. Warner of Virginia, who put forward the proposal last week in an amendment co-sponsored by Democrats Ben Nelson of Nebraska and Robert Byrd of West Virginia. The bill would grant Bush’s request for more than \$100 billion in additional funds to continue the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan until the end of the current fiscal year on September 1.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Democrat of Nevada, announced the agreement Tuesday, following talks between Democratic and Republican congressional leaders and White House Chief of Staff Joshua B. Bolten. The negotiations were launched last Friday, after the Senate vote 94-to-1 for a measure pledging “support for the troops,” i.e., full funding for the war without any restrictions on the administration’s escalation of military violence.

That set the stage for the final Democratic cave-in. The *New York Times* reported Wednesday: “Senior Democratic officials said the final bill would probably be stripped of other features that Mr. Bush had previously resisted, including readiness standards that would have prevented troops from being returned to Iraq within one year or without adequate training and equipment unless Mr. Bush signed a waiver determining it was necessary.”

Even as he admitted that the benchmark language was “extremely weak,” Reid attempted to give the deal a positive gloss, saying, “No one can say with any degree of veracity that we haven’t made great progress.”

The hypocrisy of the Democrats was aptly—if unwittingly—summed up by the *New York Times*, which sought to present the agreement as something other than a surrender. Quoting the Democratic Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, the newspaper wrote: “I would never vote for such a thing,” Ms. Pelosi said, as she entered the office of Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, to put the final touches on the \$120 billion proposal.”

Later, Pelosi called the bill, which she said she could not support, “another stage in the sequencing of ending this war.”

Other Democrats, who sought to give themselves political cover by including in the war-funding bill some provisions for “accountability” and target dates for partially withdrawing US combat troops, were more blunt. Massachusetts Democrat James McGovern said, “There are no timetables, there’s no accountability. The president doesn’t have to pay attention to any of this stuff.”

Lynn Woolsey, Democrat of California and member of the Out of Iraq Caucus in the House, said, “The president prevailed.”

White House spokesman Tony Snow made it clear that the agreement gives Bush everything he had demanded, saying, “What will be seen as a victory is providing... the funding and flexibility the forces need. That’s what we wanted all along.”

A vote on the bill is expected Thursday, and leaders of both parties say it will be passed and sent to Bush to sign prior to the weeklong Memorial Day recess.

The inclusion of 18 unenforceable benchmarks in the spending bill, far from signaling a move toward ending the war, has the reactionary aim of placing the onus for the death and destruction inflicted by the US on Iraq on the Iraqis themselves. Warner lectured the Iraqi government—a puppet regime entirely dependent on the US military and despised by the mass of Iraqis—on the meaning of the benchmarks, saying “We’re there to help you so long as you, as a sovereign nation, pull your own weight and do your responsible job.”

It is no doubt puzzling to many that, despite the massive popular opposition to Bush and the Iraq war, the Democrats are powerless against the Bush administration. In the past—in the run-up to the 2003 invasion and in the 2004 presidential election—the Democrats justified their prostration and complicity by the supposedly overwhelming popular support for the president.

The fundamental reason for the Democrats’ impotence is the character of the Democratic Party. It is, no less than the Republicans, a party of US imperialism. The Democrats have from the onset supported the basic imperialist aims underlying the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and the broader striving of the American financial elite to utilize its military power to dominate the world’s resources and markets.

The war was never simply “Bush’s war.” The Democrats repeated the lies used by the administration to drag the American people into the war and supplied the necessary votes in Congress to give Bush the authority to launch an unprovoked war of aggression. Their criticisms have been directed not against the war itself, but rather against the administration’s incompetence in conducting it and the military and political disaster it has produced.

The Democrats have done, and will do, nothing to actually halt the war or impede its expansion, because the overwhelming consensus within the US ruling elite is that any outcome perceived as a defeat for the United States would have catastrophic consequences for the global position of American capitalism.

The Republican Party, no matter how unpopular and discredited among the people, prevails because it represents most directly the interests of the most determined and ruthless sections of the ruling elite. The Democrats, on the other hand, serve a very specific function within the political establishment. They defend the basic interests of the ruling class, while promoting the fiction that their party is something it is not now and never was—a party of average working people. This is what imparts to the

Democratic Party its inveterate duplicity, half-heartedness and cowardice.

Bob Kerrey's defense of war

The imperialist and militarist perspective that actually drives the Democratic Party was spelled out in a column published in Tuesday's *Wall Street Journal* by one of the party's leading spokesmen, Bob Kerrey, former senator and current president of The New School, a university in New York.

Kerrey is among the more forthright spokesmen for US imperialism within the Democratic Party. In 2001, shortly after he left his post as senator from Nebraska to assume the presidency of the New School, it was revealed that he had commanded a Navy Seal unit in Vietnam in 1969 that carried out a massacre against a defenseless village, in which he and six soldiers under his command killed 21 women, children and elderly men.

His record as a war criminal did not prevent him from being appointed to the 9/11 Commission and continuing to hold his post at the New School. In his *Wall Street Journal* column, entitled "The Left's Iraq Muddle," Kerrey gives an unabashed defense of the war in Iraq and argues for an extension of US military violence far beyond Iraq.

In language that could have been lifted from a speech by Bush, Kerrey portrays the holocaust inflicted by the US on Iraq as a campaign for democracy.

"The key question for Congress," he writes, "is whether or not Iraq has become the primary battleground against the same radical Islamists who declared war on the US in the 1990s and who have carried out a series of terrorist operations including 9/11. The answer is emphatically, 'yes.'"

He makes the absurd claim that "Those who argue that radical Islamic terrorism has arrived in Iraq because of the US-led invasion are right. But they are right because radical Islam opposes democracy in Iraq. If our purpose had been to substitute a dictator who was more cooperative and supportive of the West, these groups wouldn't have lasted a week." But, of course, the US supports authoritarian regimes in a whole series of countries where Islamic terrorists flourish—Pakistan, Afghanistan and Egypt, to name a few.

In any event, Kerrey is not seeking to convince the general public by means of a coherent argument. Rather, he is out to convince his fellow Democrats that they can prove their right to rule to the constituency that really counts—the ruling elite—only by ignoring the sentiments of the people, abandoning their antiwar posturing and fully embracing all-out war in Iraq.

He chides "American lawmakers who are watching public opinion tell them to move away from Iraq as quickly as possible," denounces any suggestion that the war is "all about oil," and says if Democrats shy away from war "then no wonder today we Democrats are not trusted with the reins of power."

He concludes by declaring, "We must not allow terrorist sanctuaries to develop any place on earth. Whether these fighters are finding refuge in Syria, Iran, Pakistan or elsewhere, we cannot afford diplomatic or political excuses to prevent us from using military force to eliminate them."

November to May: Six months of duplicity and lies

It is instructive to review the process by which the Democratic leadership has come to its final capitulation to Bush. When the Democrats

took control of both houses of Congress last January, propelled into power by the massive antiwar vote in the November 2006 congressional elections, they began by relegating the entire question of the war to the background.

Pelosi's "100 hours" legislative agenda at the start of the 110th Congress entirely ignored the issue of the war. The resulting anger and indignation among Democratic voters, intensified by Bush's January 10 announcement of a "surge" of tens of thousands of additional troops into Iraq, compelled the party leadership to shift tactics. What followed was an elaborate and carefully calculated effort to dupe the population into believing that the Democrats were seeking to end the war, while they swore off any actions that would actually impede its prosecution.

This included the non-binding resolutions against the "surge" in February. Beginning in March the Democrats passed measures in the House and Senate that gave Bush his requested funds to continue the war, with various timetables attached for partially withdrawing US combat troops. All of the Democratic proposals allowed for an indefinite continued presence of tens of thousands of troops after the supposed deadlines for withdrawal.

When Bush, on May 1, vetoed the Democratic bill that resulted from negotiations between the House and Senate, the end game was already clear. Democratic leaders in both houses gave repeated assurances that they would under no circumstances cut off funding "for the troops," even as the toll of American soldiers killed and wounded soared, and Iraq sank ever further into a state of hellish chaos, death and destruction.

They announced that they would come up with a bill acceptable to Bush prior to the May 28 Memorial Day holiday, producing the inevitable and final capitulation that has now occurred.

At every step of the way, the Democratic leadership was aided and abetted by supposedly antiwar Democrats such as the Out of Iraq caucus, who provided the necessary votes to pass war-funding measures, and left-liberal forces such as the *Nation* magazine and the leaders of protest groups such as United for Peace and Justice, who presented the Democratic Party as a genuine vehicle for opposing and ending the war.

These events have fully confirmed the analysis and perspective of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*. On November 8, one day after the midterm elections, the WSWP published an editorial board statement that said:

"The Democratic Party is the beneficiary of overwhelming antiwar sentiment that it did nothing to encourage and which stands in stark opposition to its own pro-war policy. There is a vast chasm between the massive antiwar sentiment within the electorate and the commitment of Democratic Party leaders to 'victory in Iraq' and continued prosecution of the 'war on terror.' ...

"Those who voted for the Democratic Party in order to express their opposition to the Bush administration and the war will rapidly discover that a Democratic electoral victory will produce no significant change in US policy, either abroad or at home. Millions of working people and youth will sooner rather than later come into direct conflict with the Democrats."

Eight days later, the WSWP published a statement of the Socialist Equality Party that declared:

"However sharp the differences within the political establishment over the Bush administration's conduct of the war in Iraq—and more generally its reckless and ignorant approach to complex problems of foreign policy—no substantial section of the ruling elite is prepared to countenance a withdrawal of US forces under conditions where such action would be seen as a military defeat and represent a devastating setback to the regional and global interests of American imperialism.

"The internal debates within the policy-making establishment—Democratic and Republican—are aimed at forging a new strategic consensus on the future conduct of American policy in the

Middle East. While the depth of antiwar sentiment expressed in last week's elections came as something of a shock to both parties, their leaders are not in the least inclined to allow the attitude of the broad mass of the American people determine the foreign policy objectives of the United States."

The experience of the past six months since the November election has underscored the incompatibility of the interests of working people with the entire two-party system, and the need to break with the Democrats and build a mass, independent and socialist movement to end the war in Iraq and prevent new imperialist wars.



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