

Following Bush veto, Democrats prepare war-spending bill with no timeline

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US President George Bush vetoed the \$124 billion bill to fund the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan Tuesday, rejecting provisions of the bill calling for a partial withdrawal of some US troops from Iraq.

Democratic Party leaders have already begun circulating drafts of a bill that will fully fund the Iraq war, without the restrictions that the White House opposes.

In a statement following the veto, Bush voiced his contempt for the views of the majority of the American population who oppose the war in Iraq. He said that the legislation “substitutes the opinion of politicians for the judgment of military commanders”. This statement, which has become a major talking point for administration officials, amounts to the insistence that the US elections, in which the American people expressed their opposition to the war, will have no impact on war policy.

In defiance of the will of the American people, the escalation of the war, in which tens of thousands of more troops have been sent to Iraq, will continue. Bush said that it will be the end of the summer before an assessment of the consequences of the troop increase can be made. In other words, these additional troops will remain in Iraq until at least that time, probably much longer.

To justify the continued occupation of Iraq, Bush again raised the specter of September 11, claiming that most of the recent violence in Iraq was caused by Al Qaeda. This is an enemy that “everyone agrees we should be fighting,” he said, adding that if the war in Iraq was ended, Al Qaeda forces in Iraq would carry out another terrorist attack in the United States.

While Bush’s veto is a flagrant spurning of the democratically expressed views of the American people, the Democratic bill that he rejected itself had

nothing to do with opposition to the war. Even if it were to be passed, it would maintain a US military presence in Iraq indefinitely.

In the course of his remarks, Bush also indicated that he understood the Democrats had no intention of ending the occupation of Iraq. Democrats “have sent their message and now it is time to put politics behind us” and pass a bill without any timeline. In other words, the Democrats need to end their posturing as opponents of the war. “Here in Washington we have our differences on the way forward for Iraq,” he said, “and we will debate them openly ... but surely we can agree that we need to get our troops this funding.”

Indeed, this is something upon which both the Democrats and the Republicans do agree. Bush’s veto followed a ceremony by Democratic leaders held before sending the legislation to the White House. In their remarks, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid again reiterated their basic commitment to the war in Iraq and US military strategy in the Middle East.

Pelosi praised the bill’s “strong commitment to support our troops”. Reid repeated his statement that “a change of course in Iraq” is necessary, making clear that he favors a different strategy for US domination of the country, not the withdrawal of US troops. “A veto means denying the troops the resources and the strategy they need,” he declared.

Reid said that the bill “holds Iraqis accountable for providing political solutions” and “redeploys our troops out of an intractable civil war”. This was a reference to the position of many Democrats that US troops should play a less active role in the urban centers, retreating to military bases where they can guard key US interests, including oil, while intervening when necessary to crush resistance.

Reid's reference to "holding Iraqis accountable" has become a theme for Democrats, who have sought to pin responsibility for the situation in Iraq on the Iraqi government, rather than the American occupation. They want the Bush administration to increase pressure on the government of Nouri al-Maliki to crack down on opponents of the American occupation and pass laws favorable to American corporations.

In their brief remarks, both Reid and Pelosi stressed their commitment to the "war on terror" as a justification for US military action in the Middle East and Central Asia. Reid said that if the bill passed, then the two parties "can refocus our full attention on fighting the war on terror". Pelosi referred to the bill itself as the "Global War on Terror supplemental".

These statements are indications of concern within sections of the ruling elite that the crisis of the US occupation of Iraq is undermining the ability of the American military to intervene elsewhere. Democrats have criticized Bush administration strategy in Iraq for tying down US troops and making it more difficult to threaten Iran, North Korea or other countries.

Nevertheless, both Reid and Pelosi sought to present the bill to continue funding the war as a fulfillment of the desires expressed by the American people in the November elections. Pelosi claimed that the bill, which would provide non-binding restrictions on the Bush administration and would leave tens of thousands of troops in Iraq, "respects the wishes of the American people to end the Iraq war".

Following Bush's veto, Pelosi read a statement in which she sought to downplay even the question of a limited timeline for withdrawal, declaring that the American people voted for "benchmarks, guidelines, standards".

In fact, what the American people want overwhelmingly is an end to the Iraq war—a position that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans support.

There has been a strong element of play-acting in this entire process. Before the bill was passed in Congress, it was already clear that it would be vetoed and the Democrats would then provide the administration with a funding bill without even nominal constraints. The charade of the past several days has been an attempt by the Democrats to present themselves as an oppositional force, even as a deal is worked out that will allow the occupation of Iraq to continue.

~~Washington~~ article ~~Timan~~ then reported that Reid is courting support from Republican senators for a new bill that Bush will sign. "Senior Democratic aides say that although House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is not similarly talking to Republicans about a post-veto agreement," the newspaper reported, "she privately acknowledges that eventually 'the money will get to the troops without timetables'."

House Democrats will make a show of attempting to override the veto, but they do not have enough votes to do so. Given a failure in the House, the Senate is not expected to even make an attempt at an override.

On Wednesday afternoon, Bush is scheduled to meet with congressional leaders of both parties, including Reid and Pelosi, to work out some agreement on the war-funding resolution. Bush indicated on Monday that he considered the prospects for a resolution to be good. "I believe that there's a lot of Democrats that understand that we need to get the money to the troops as soon as possible," he said, "and so I'm optimistic we can get something done in a positive way".

A likely compromise will see the removal of any reference to a timeline, while leaving in place "benchmarks" for the Iraqi government to follow. These benchmarks are the same as those proposed earlier by Bush. The most important of these for the American ruling elite is the passage of a law that will open up the country's oil resources to international oil companies.



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