

Democrats, White House agree: Iraq war will rage on regardless of Senate debate

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The two weeks of official debate over the war in Iraq which began Tuesday in the US Senate will do nothing to stop the ongoing bloodbath. The Bush administration will continue with the military escalation that has killed tens of thousands of Iraqis since January, as well as more than 600 US troops. The congressional Democrats will continue their “antiwar” posturing, while doing nothing that could actually affect the course of events.

Bush set the tone for the week with a blustering and reactionary speech in Cleveland, Ohio on Tuesday, where he made it clear that the defection by as many as a dozen Senate Republicans would have no effect on the administration’s war policy. Implicitly rejecting the notion that the American people should have any say on the war, he declared that the course of military operations in Iraq would “be decided by our commanders on the ground, not by political figures in Washington, DC.”

This demagoguery, a staple of Bush’s posture on the war for most of the past four years, amounts to a flat rejection of democratic and constitutional principles, one of which is that elected representatives of the people, not uniformed officers, should have the final decision on the great questions of war and peace.

Bush’s statement is also, like nearly everything else he says about the war, a lie. The president himself is, of course, a “political figure in Washington, DC.” While he invokes the supposed authority of the military brass in order to hide behind it, Bush has reshuffled “commanders on the ground” more than once to find officers who would embrace the military strategy propounded by the White House.

Translated into plain English, Bush’s position amounts to this: the American people are not entitled to put an end the war, no matter how large the majority opposed to it and how passionate and angry their opposition. He alone (the “decider,” as Bush likes to call himself), has the right to wage war, at the cost of thousands of lives and more than one trillion dollars, as long as he remains in office.

The capitulation of the Democrats to this position was voiced by the two top Senate Democratic leaders. Majority Leader Harry Reid said Tuesday that the amendment to the defense authorization bill which he is co-sponsoring with Wisconsin Democrat Russell Feingold would leave a large US military force in Iraq.

The Feingold-Reid plan calls on Bush to withdraw most US troops from Iraq by next April, but Reid declared, “Feingold-Reid called for American troops to remain in Iraq to do

counterterrorism, to protect our assets in Iraq, to train the Iraqis. There’s estimates that that would still leave tens of thousands of troops in Iraq.” He added, “No one is calling for a precipitous withdrawal in Iraq.”

Majority Whip Richard Durbin of Illinois was equally explicit, telling the *Washington Post* Tuesday that despite the shift of some Republican senators to support legislation to withdraw some or most combat troops, no action was likely any time soon. “Obviously there are folks who want the war to end today, and all the troops to be home tomorrow,” he said. “And even though I think that is a worthy goal, it is not a realistic goal.”

He was not himself in favor of an immediate pullout, Durbin said. “We also understand that just leaving cold turkey, with everything gone, could have the whole region descend into chaos.”

These views were echoed by the former Democratic congressman, Lee Hamilton, who co-chaired the bipartisan Iraq Study Group with former secretary of state James Baker. Appearing on the CNN network “American Morning” program, Hamilton said that despite the deteriorating position in Iraq and the growing domestic opposition, he was opposed to what he called a “cut and run” policy.

The week began with suggestions that the shift of a half dozen or more Republican senators might lead to the adoption of a number of restrictions on military policy in Iraq as amendments to the defense authorization bill now before the Senate. But the very first vote, on a resolution introduced by Democrat James Webb of Virginia limiting the frequency of troop rotations into the war zone, failed to win the necessary 60 votes to end debate on the measure. The 56-41 vote saw 49 Democrats and one independent joined by only six Republicans, four fewer than needed to force a vote on the proposal.

Subsequent resolutions—to cut off funding for combat operations from next April (Feingold-Reid), to mandate a withdrawal beginning in 120 days to be completed by next March 31 (co-sponsored by Democrats Carl Levin and Jack Reed), to rescind the October 2002 resolution authorizing the Iraq war (co-sponsored by Hillary Clinton and Robert Byrd), and to adopt the Iraq Study Group recommendations as official US policy—are even less likely to win passage.

The Webb resolution, cosponsored by Republican Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, was thought to have the best chance of passage because it could be presented as a “pro-troop” measure to allow US soldiers to spend more time recuperating from the war before

returning to combat.

Like Feingold-Reid, the Levin-Reed amendment calls not for withdrawal of US troops, but for redeployment, removing soldiers from combat patrols in Iraqi cities but keeping them in the country to exert American control from protected bases. Senator Reed of Rhode Island, a former paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division, returned from his tenth trip to Iraq to declare his opposition to all-out withdrawal.

Citing his meetings with the representatives of various Iraqi political figures who have served in one or another US-backed stooge regime, Reed said, "I think also there is a concern that a total withdrawal of American forces very quickly would inject so much uncertainty in the situation that they'd be better off with some type of presence."

A flock of Bush administration officials spent Tuesday and Wednesday on Capitol Hill meeting with wavering Republican senators. Bush met with two of the most fervently pro-war Senate Republicans, John McCain and Lindsey Graham, at a White House strategy session Wednesday. McCain and Graham came out of the meeting hailing "progress" on the military front and declaring that Congress should take no action on the war until after Gen. David Petraeus presents a report on the Bush "surge" of additional troops into Iraq in mid-September.

An even more fervent declaration of support for the war came from Independent Democrat Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, who gave a floor speech Tuesday declaring, "American and Iraqi security forces are winning." This was on the day that nearly three dozen mortar and rocket rounds slammed into the Green Zone in Baghdad, where the US embassy and most top Iraqi government officials are headquartered. Three people were killed and dozens wounded.

An interim report on the surge and on political developments in Iraq was mandated by Congress for delivery by July 15. According to media reports, this document will find little or no progress on any of the benchmarks set down in the emergency resolution which provided another \$100 billion in funding for the war, adopted by the Democratic-controlled Congress in May.

In an effort to sustain the pretense of vigorous Democratic opposition to the war in the face of the evident Senate collapse, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced Tuesday that the House of Representatives will vote later the week on a "troop withdrawal" bill. The label is a misnomer, since the bill provides only for gradual withdrawal of combat troops by the end of March 2008, while tens of thousands of US military personnel will remain in the country in the guise of "training" Iraqi forces and conducting "counter-terrorism" operations.

The opposition to the war on the part of the congressional Democrats is stage-managed and fraudulent to the core. Congress has ample power to bring an end to the war, and could have done so already simply by refusing to pass the emergency funding bill, an action that would, according to the Pentagon, have compelled curtailment of combat operations by early June.

Instead of taking the action which they have the constitutional authority and legislative power to accomplish, the Democratic leadership has deliberately chosen to seek votes on resolutions that can't pass and wouldn't actually bind the president if they did

(Levin-Reed and Feingold-Reid, for instance, allow Bush to waive their provisions in the name of "national security"). They want to have it both ways—appealing to antiwar sentiment in the run-up to the 2008 elections, while allowing the continuation of the war, which they initially supported and whose fundamental goals they still endorse.

This cowardly and two-faced policy comes amid rising popular opposition to the war, which finds no real expression in the political establishment. According to the most recent CNN poll, 67 percent of the people oppose the Iraq war and 66 percent disapprove of Bush's performance in office. A new USA Today/Gallup poll found more than 70 percent of Americans in favor of withdrawing US troops by April 2008. Sizeable percentages—39 percent in one poll, 36 percent in the other—favor the impeachment of Bush, while clear majorities favor the impeachment of Vice President Cheney.

The fear of this growing antiwar sentiment is what underlies both the posturing by the congressional Democrats and the criticism of the White House from some Senate Republicans. Their concern is not merely the outcome of elections 16 months away, but the danger that continuing a bloody war in the face of such intense domestic opposition could produce social and political convulsions within the United States.

At the same time, no section of the ruling elite is prepared to concede defeat in the Persian Gulf, a region which, as the source of the bulk of the world's oil imports, is of the utmost strategic importance to American imperialism. As former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger spelled out in a grimly worded op-ed column published Monday, "Whatever our domestic timetables, the collapse of the American effort in Iraq would be a geopolitical calamity."

The war in Iraq will not be ended by the Bush administration, or by a Democratic successor, because both the Democratic and Republican parties are unalterably committed to the defense of the worldwide strategic interests of the American financial aristocracy. The struggle against war requires a political break by working people from the two-party system and the building of a new independent political party of the working class.



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