

Bush prepares new Iraq escalation as congressional Democrats blather on

Patrick Martin
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As Senate Democratic leaders moved Tuesday to stage an all-night session devoted to votes on supposedly “anti-war” measures that have no chance of passage, the Bush administration has dropped a series of hints that it plans to intensify rather than reduce the violence in Iraq.

Bush called in a hand-picked group of right-wing columnists and commentators to the White House Friday, telling them to put no stock in press reports that the White House was contemplating a change in policy on the war. According to a report in *National Review Online* by Kate O’Beirne and Rich Lowry, two of those invited, “Forget the leaks and the speculation, President George W. Bush is not looking for a way out of the surge and the Iraq war.”

“A confident and determined president made it clear that he is going to see the surge through, and will rely on General David Petraeus’s advice on how to proceed come September, regardless of the political climate in Washington,” they wrote.

Conservative *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, another invited guest, suggested in his column July 17 that further escalation of the surge might be in order: “Bush was assertive,” he wrote, “he is unshakably committed to stabilizing Iraq. If Gen. David Petraeus comes back and says he needs more troops and more time, Bush will scrounge up the troops.”

This suggestion was reinforced by the comments of Gen. Peter Pace, the outgoing chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, during a visit to Baghdad Monday. Pace declared that the surge had produced a “sea change” in security conditions in Iraq. According to an Associated Press report, “Pace said earlier in Baghdad that the US military is continuing various options for Iraq, including an even bigger troop buildup if President Bush thinks his ‘surge’ strategy needs a

further boost.”

Pace told reporters that the military “must be prepared for whatever it’s going to look like two months from now. That way, if we need to plus up or come down” in troop numbers, the necessary operational plans will be in place.

These comments give the lie to claims by congressional Democratic leaders that they are waging an all-out battle that is pushing the Republican Party and the Bush administration toward withdrawal from Iraq.

The House of Representatives passed a resolution late Friday, by a near-party-line vote of 223 to 205, for a measure to require US combat troops to begin coming home within 120 days of passage of the legislation, with most to be removed by April 1, 2008. The bill permits tens of thousands of US troops to remain in occupation of the country, so long as their mission is defined as to combat terrorism, train Iraqi soldiers and defend US installations.

All members of the “Out of Iraq” caucus, numbering about 80 Democrats, voted for the bill, which would legitimize the open-ended US occupation of Iraq, with the exception of congressman and presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich. Four Republicans voted for the bill, while nine conservative Democrats voted against it.

Both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have already foresworn the only effective legislative measure against the war—a cutoff of funding—in favor of resolutions that either will be vetoed without possibility of an override, like the House measure, or that will not even receive a vote, as in the Senate, where most Republicans are committed to filibuster any restriction on the Bush administration’s war policy.

Despite claims by Harry Reid that he was stepping up the pressure for a withdrawal of US forces in Iraq, the Tuesday all-nighter is merely a protest stunt that the Democrats hope will make them appear to oppose the war, while allowing the bloodbath to continue, and even escalate further.

Only three Senate Republicans have agreed to back the principal Democratic amendment to the defense appropriations bill, drafted by Carl Levin of Michigan and Jack Reed of Rhode Island, which mirrors the bill passed by the House Friday. With at least one Democrat, “independent” Joseph Lieberman, committed to all-out support for the White House on the war, at least ten Republicans would have to defect to halt a filibuster and compel a vote.

Majority Leader Reid reiterated his intention to keep the legislative farce going as long as possible. “We’re going to continue working on this until we get a vote on this amendment,” he said. “It’s unfortunate that President Bush has proven, beyond any doubt, that he won’t listen to the Congress or the American people unless he’s forced to, and that’s what this amendment does.”

The Senate is scheduled to vote Wednesday on the Levin-Reed amendment, and perhaps later in the week on two others: a bipartisan measure, drafted by Democrat Ken Salazar of Colorado and Republican Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, to adopt the Iraq Study Group recommendations as official policy; and the proposal offered by two pillars of the Republican Senate establishment, John Warner of Virginia and Richard Lugar of Indiana, which would require Bush to carry out advance planning for a troop withdrawal, but would not mandate the removal of a single soldier.

As the charade continues, there has been increasing commentary in the media about the congressional Democratic leadership being in danger of alienating public opinion, which is far more hostile to the continuation of the war than anyone in the Senate.

A commentary in *Time* magazine, headlined, “The Iraq Debate That Wasn’t,” began by noting that most Americans were being given the impression there is a congressional debate over the war, but in reality, both sides support a continuing long-term US military occupation of Iraq. The magazine observed:

“Even if the Democrats’ position is not in fact that far from where the President claims to be headed, both

sides are portraying the gap between them as unbridgeable. Which, in turn, leaves the impression that the debate is between those who want to escalate the war and those who want to withdraw US forces entirely... If you’re looking for someone who will lead a speedy withdrawal from Iraq, you’ll have to go to the extreme left or right of the parties. Nobody in the mainstream is looking to get out soon.”

There are, of course, intense and bitter conflicts over Iraq policy, between the Democrats and Republicans and within both parties. These conflicts revolve around two issues: what methods should be employed to salvage what can be saved from the wreckage of the Bush administration’s reckless policy; and who will pay the political price for the debacle. But no significant section of the US political establishment, in either party, supports an abandonment of the effort to dominate the oil fields of the Middle East and gain a decisive strategic advantage over rival capitalist powers like China, Russia and the European Union.



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