

# Democrats prostrate as Bush, generals vow Iraq war will continue for years

Patrick Martin  
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The televised hearings on the Iraq war before House and Senate committees have demonstrated two political facts: the Bush administration and the Pentagon plan to continue the war in Iraq indefinitely, and the Democratic Party leaders, in both Congress and the presidential campaign, intend to do nothing to stop them.

During two days of testimony, Gen. David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker defended the administration's plan to gradually draw down the "surge" of 30,000 troops in Iraq over the next ten months, bringing the total US occupation force back to the level of 130,000 that prevailed during the first three years of the war. Bush is to unveil the proposal formally in a Thursday night speech on national television.

Both Petraeus and Crocker repeatedly refused to set any limit on the duration of the US occupation of Iraq, other than the achievement of "success." They have been echoed by a number of other spokesmen for American imperialism.

\* On Wednesday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said "we're at the beginning of a long process... what the president called a long time ago a generational challenge."

\* On Tuesday, retired General John Abizaid, who headed the US Central Command and was in overall charge of military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 to early this year, said in an interview with the Associated Press, "I think in terms of time, Iraq stabilizes in the next three to five years. That means we need to adjust our presence according to the security situation."

\* Also on Tuesday, the US Institute of Peace, the congressionally funded think tank that sponsored the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, issued a report suggesting a similar time span for the US

occupation, estimating that it would be three years before Iraqi forces would be able to take the primary role in security in Iraq, and five years before a handover could be completed.

\* Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations, who serves on an advisory panel for General Petraeus, told the online publication *Slate* that "the strategy in Iraq would require the presence of roughly 100,000 American troops for 20 years," and even then the result would be a "long-shot gamble."

After delivering his television speech Thursday night to justify the continued US occupation, Bush will travel to the Marine base at Quantico, Virginia for a speech Friday on Iraq. Vice President Cheney will also address a military audience at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, headquarters of the US Central Command.

In advance of the speech, the congressional Democratic leadership declared its opposition to the White House plan, while making it clear that they would take no action to actually halt the bloodbath in Iraq.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid declared, "This is unacceptable to me, it's unacceptable to the American people." He said the Bush plan "is neither a drawdown nor a change in mission that we need. His plan is just more of the same."

Reid appealed publicly to Senate Republicans to oppose the plan, citing the need for 60 votes to overcome a filibuster or 67 votes to override a presidential veto. "It's time to change," he said. "It's the president's war. At this point it also appears clear it's also the Senate Republicans' war."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, after meeting with Bush at the White House, issued a statement that "President Bush's policy announced by General Petraeus is a path to

10 more years of war in Iraq.”

She continued: “General Petraeus’ testimony to Congress drew a bright line: redeployment is not an option; endless war in Iraq is the administration’s only option.”

Contrary to these statements, the indefinite continuation of the war in Iraq is not the “only option” of merely the Bush administration. It is the consensus policy of the entire American ruling elite, albeit occasionally disguised by the antiwar posturing of the “Out of Iraq” caucus in the House of Representatives and “end the war” pledges by the Democratic presidential hopefuls.

All three leading Democratic presidential candidates—Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator Barack Obama and former Senator John Edwards—have pledged to withdraw all US combat troops by sometime in 2008. This pledge is useful for electoral purposes, as they position their campaigns to appeal to antiwar sentiment.

At the same time, all three are committed to maintaining the US military occupation of Iraq, disguised as “training” Iraqi forces or combating “terrorism,” more or less indefinitely, should they win the November 2008 election and establish a Democratic administration in January 2009. Clinton once suggested that her goal was the withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq by the end of her first term—i.e., January 2013, when the US occupation would have extended for nearly ten years.

There is no reason to take even that promise seriously, since the Democratic Party remains unalterably committed to the defense of American imperialist interests in the Persian Gulf, source of much of the world’s oil, as well as in Central Asia.

This was underscored in the lengthy questioning of Petraeus and Crocker at the hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which stretched into Tuesday evening. A series of Democratic senators, nearly all of whom voted for the war authorization resolution in October 2002, criticized Bush’s conduct of the war in Iraq as a diversion from the struggle against Al Qaeda or a waste of resources that should be used to deal with more pressing problems, such as Iran.

All of the senators accepted the essential framework of the war presented by Petraeus and Crocker—that the problem in Iraq is the growth of sectarian conflict and the inability of Iraqi political leaders to come to a political settlement. Perhaps the low point at the hearing came when Senator Edward Kennedy, longtime leader of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, summed up the attempt of Democratic war “critics” to shift the blame for

the devastation of the country onto the Iraqis themselves, saying, “I’d suggest that the Iraqi political leadership is holding hostage American service men and women in Iraq.”

There was no suggestion that the fundamental cause of the bloodbath is the US occupation—a word that was uttered only once in the course of a five-hour hearing.

The embrace of US imperialist interests was summed up by Senator Evan Bayh, a Democrat from Indiana, who told Petraeus and Crocker, “We all want to be successful in Iraq. We all hope that these signs you indicate come to fruition...”

Who is this “we?” Tens of millions of the American people, and the vast majority of the world’s people, recognize that the war in Iraq is not a mistake, or a “failed policy,” as Hillary Clinton put it, but a criminal act of aggression. Genuine opponents of the war in Iraq do not wish for the “success” of this crime, but demand its immediate and unconditional end.

It is not the case, as the congressional Democrats claim, that they would end the war if they could, but lack the votes. A simple refusal to provide further funds or authorization for the war—an action that requires overriding neither a Senate filibuster nor a Bush veto—would be sufficient. But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi rejected such a course of action even before she took office.

When push came to shove, last May, both House and Senate Democrats approved some \$200 billion in emergency funding to continue the war through September 30. A new funding bill, estimated at more than \$200 billion, is to be introduced soon, and will in the end receive the same bipartisan rubber stamp, in the name of “supporting the troops”—i.e., making it possible for Bush, Cheney & Co. to kill more of them.

The Democrats will not end the war because, despite their occasional antiwar posturing, they support the Bush administration’s military aggression and occupation, and plan to continue it in the event a Democrat wins the White House in 2008. As Pelosi said in an interview with ABC television before her audience Wednesday with Bush: “I always try to find common ground with the president.”



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