

Obama vows to back Bush's war commander

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Democratic presidential front-runner Senator Barack Obama said on Sunday he would endorse Bush's nominee to direct US military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout a region extending from North Africa to Central Asia. The pledge, made on the "Fox News Sunday" program, while predictable, serves nonetheless to thoroughly expose the antiwar pretenses of Obama and the Democratic Party as a whole.

Obama was asked by Fox's Chris Wallace: "Senator, this week President Bush named David Petraeus, the commander of US forces in Iraq, to be the head of Central Command.... Will you vote to confirm his nomination?"

Obama responded, "Yes. I think Petraeus has done a good tactical job in Iraq. I think as a practical matter, obviously, that's where most of the attention has been devoted from this administration over the last several years."

The Democratic candidate went on to declare himself a "big respector" of Admiral William Fallon, who, by Pentagon accounts, loathed Petraeus as a political general and sycophant for the Bush White House. Fallon was forced to resign as head of Central Command last month.

Obama continued by praising Fallon for his supposed view "that we have to think about more than just Iraq. That we've got issues with Iran and Pakistan and Afghanistan and our singular focus on Iraq, I think, has distracted us."

He added, "My hope is that Petraeus would reflect that wider view of our strategic interests."

There is no reason to doubt that he will do just that.

Fallon was forced to resign following the publication of an article in *Esquire* magazine portraying him as an opponent of the Bush administration's drive towards war against Iran.

Petraeus, on the other hand, has identified himself fully with the war policy of the Bush administration, including the promotion of an attack on Iran. In his testimony before Congress at the beginning of this month, Petraeus used his progress report on the occupation of Iraq—where he is presently the top US commander—to make the case that the "malign influence" and "nefarious activities" of Iran constituted the principal source of armed conflict in the country and the main cause of US troop deaths.

The general is presently preparing a briefing that will present Washington's case alleging Iranian responsibility for attacks in Iraq.

Pressed on whether he would replace Petraeus if the general opposed his campaign pledge to withdraw US combat troops from Iraq, Obama replied, "I will listen to General Petraeus, given the experience that he has accumulated over the last several years. It would be stupid of me to ignore what he has to say."

In announcing the nomination of Petraeus, Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated that Petraeus's appointment was designed to "provide some continuity for a new administration"—in other words, to ensure that the occupation and high troop levels in Iraq are continued after Bush is out of the White House.

As he has in the past, Obama couched his call for a reduction in the number of US troops in Iraq—his plan would still leave tens of thousands of American soldiers and Marines occupying the country—within the framework of broader US strategic interests which, he suggests, will require the use of military power elsewhere. He vowed to "make the strategic decisions in light of the problems that we're having in Afghanistan, in light of the problems we're having in Pakistan, the fact that Al Qaeda is strengthening, as our National Intelligence Estimates have indicated since 2001."

Obama's call to reconfigure US military deployments in light of "wider strategic interests," including "issues with Iran," comes just days after Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, used a Pentagon press conference to issue a threat that the US military is planning "potential military courses of action" against Iran.

Mullen blamed Iran for "killing American and coalition soldiers in Iraq," a charge that is repeated incessantly, with no substantive proof presented to back it up. He warned Tehran, "It would be a mistake to think that we are out of combat capability."

The elevation of Petraeus to head Central Command is part of what is emerging as an escalating campaign in preparation for war against Iran. The Bush administration could well launch such an attack before the November election in an attempt to change the political landscape in the US with another dose of "shock and awe."

If it does so, it will enjoy the added benefit of having the ostensible opposition, the Democrats—whoever emerges as their candidate—exposed as complicit in another war of aggression.

Senator Hillary Clinton has outdone Obama in bellicose rhetoric, stating recently that she would answer an attack on

Israel with the “total obliteration” of Iran, essentially committing genocide against a nation of 71 million people.

There is no doubt that she, like Obama, will vote to approve Petraeus as the commander who would have principal responsibility for preparing a war on Iran. In January 2007, they both answered “yea” to the general’s nomination as commander in Iraq, which was approved by a vote of 81-0 in the Senate. This was after Petraeus testified on Capitol Hill in support of the “surge” that was to send an additional 30,000 US troops to occupy Iraq, rendering the confirmation vote a tacit Democratic endorsement of this escalation.

With a week to go until the next round of Democratic primaries, which take place in Indiana and North Carolina, Clinton has sought to identify her campaign ever more closely with “national security” and militarism. She has appeared at several events with the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, retired Gen. Hugh Shelton, who has boasted that no officer holding that title had ever before endorsed a presidential candidate.

Speaking in Fayetteville, North Carolina, home of Fort Bragg, the headquarters of the Army’s 82nd Airborne division and Special Operations Command, Clinton hedged on her own campaign pledge to withdraw US combat troops from Iraq, saying that she would do so “as responsibly and quickly as we can.”

She continued: “This will not be easy. There are no quick solutions to the dilemmas we face and the consequences that are likely to flow from whatever actions are taken.”

Speaking at a rally in Cape Fear, North Carolina on Sunday, Clinton advanced a similar argument as Obama’s: that US troop strength should be reduced in Iraq so that it can be deployed elsewhere. She pointed to the attempted assassination earlier in the day of Afghanistan’s US-backed President Hamid Karzai as proof that Washington needed to concentrate more of its military forces in suppressing the insurgency there. The US, she said has “not given the resources” needed in Afghanistan, and the country should get “as much, if not more attention” than Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Congress is preparing to vote once again to fund the war and occupation in Iraq. The package being put together will be the largest ever, as the Democratic leadership cynically maneuvers to avoid yet another war funding vote on the eve of the November elections.

It is anticipated that a bill will be introduced as early as this week providing not only the \$108 billion requested by the White House to fund the war until the end of the current fiscal year, but an additional “bridge fund” of \$70 billion that would pay for continuing it at its present level until six months into the term of the next president.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Democrat of California) is reportedly planning to sweeten the deal by tacking onto the war spending measure proposals to extend unemployment benefits for 13 weeks and provide additional GI Bill benefits for Iraq

and Afghanistan veterans. The Democratic leadership is expected to end up splitting the vote, allowing a section of congressional Democrats to cast an entirely symbolic vote against funding the war, while voting for the domestic spending measures.

The Democrats’ preparations to vote for war funding unfold in the context of opinion polls which indicate that discontent with the war and opposition to Bush are at a peak. Bush’s unfavorable ratings have set a record for a US president.

In a Gallup poll released Monday, 63 percent of Americans surveyed said they believed the war in Iraq was a “mistake.”

“The new high in Iraq war opposition is also notable because it is the highest ‘mistake’ percentage Gallup has ever measured for an active war involving the United States—surpassing by two points the 61percent who said the Vietnam War was a mistake in May 1971,” said Gallup’s Jeffrey Jones.

In a poll released by Gallup last week, just 28 percent of those surveyed said that they approved of Bush’s performance as president, a record low since the polling agency began measuring presidential popularity 70 years ago.

The failure of the Democrats, despite overwhelming popular antiwar sentiment, to take any action to end the Iraq war—together with their joining with the administration in promoting a new war against Iran—is not merely a matter of political cowardice. The policies of the Democratic Party, like those of the Republicans, are determined not by the sentiments of the American people, but rather by the strategic aims of US imperialism and the interests of the financial elite that rules America.

Despite bitter divisions over the conduct of the Iraq war, both parties remain committed to the essential objectives that underlay the war from the beginning—the attempt to utilize US military force to assert hegemony over key oil-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, and thereby gain a decisive advantage over existing and potential rivals on the world stage.

Both the policies of the Bush administration and the trajectory of the Democratic presidential primary campaign indicate a growing belief within the ruling elite that the only way out of the debacle in Iraq is the launching of a new and even bloodier war against Iran.



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