

Obama backs long-term US military presence in Iraq

Patrick Martin
29 July 2008

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama reiterated his support for an open-ended US military presence in Iraq over the weekend, further narrowing his professed differences with the Bush administration and Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

In an interview with *Newsweek* correspondent Richard Wolffe, published on the magazine's web site Saturday, Obama emphasized that his policy in Iraq was one of "phased withdrawal," in which US troops could remain in large numbers in Iraq for many years. "They're going to need our help for some time," he said.

"We're going to have to provide them with logistical support, intelligence support," Obama continued. "We're going to have to have a very capable counterterrorism strike force. We're going to have to continue to train their Army and police to make them more effective."

Asked about how large a force would be required to carry out these missions, Obama replied, "I do think that's entirely conditions-based. It's hard to anticipate where we may be six months from now, or a year from now, or a year and a half from now."

The McCain campaign immediately highlighted Obama's reference to troop withdrawal decisions being "conditions-based," declaring that he was conceding the correctness of the policy pursued by the Bush administration and advocated by McCain, rejecting any "artificial" deadline for the removal of American troops.

"Barack Obama is ultimately articulating a position of sustained troop levels in Iraq based on the conditions on the ground and the security of the country," said McCain spokesman Tucker Bounds. "That is the very same position that John McCain has long held."

Obama's sharp swing to the right on foreign policy has been noted in another quarter: Israel, where politicians from right-wing Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his Labor Party rival Ehud Barak all applauded the Democratic candidate's

stance on Iran. Writing in Israel's largest-circulation newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*, columnist Itamar Eichner declared, "For every fear, query or question, Obama immediately produced a suitable Zionist answer."

Walter Russell Mead, a conservative foreign policy analyst, commented on the broader foreign policy convergence of Obama, Bush and McCain in an op-ed column published in the *Los Angeles Times* Sunday. He wrote, "Obama's pilgrimage abroad points to a larger truth: In the midst of a bitter political year, a loose bipartisan consensus on the Mideast may be emerging."

The four main policy issues on which the two candidates and the Bush administration have substantial agreement, he wrote, include: greater US military involvement in Afghanistan and Central Asia; using whatever force is necessary to prevent the collapse of the current Iraqi regime; siding with Israel against the Palestinians; and pressure on Iran, using diplomacy, sanctions and force if ultimately required to prevent Tehran from developing nuclear weapons.

Practically gloating over the rebuff being delivered to the widespread popular opposition to the war in Iraq, Mead added, "And, irony of ironies, the consensus, seemingly embraced by Obama, seems closer to Bush's views than to those of the antiwar activists who propelled the Illinois senator to the nomination."

The right-wing columnist was underlining the most important feature of the 2008 presidential election campaign: once again, as in the previous three elections, the Democratic Party is serving as the political graveyard for opposition to American militarism.

Hundreds of thousands of people, many of them youth and students, backed the Obama campaign hoping that his election would lead to an end to the war in Iraq. Obama appealed to antiwar sentiment in his primary campaign against Hillary Clinton, declaring that the war was one "that should never have been authorized and never been

waged.”

But as he seeks to pass the final hurdle in the presidential contest—assuring the most powerful sections of the US ruling elite that he will defend their strategic and economic interests, in the Middle East and throughout the world—Obama has abandoned his antiwar rhetoric and speaks openly as the prospective commander-in-chief of American imperialism.

The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee sounded this theme in an interview on “Meet the Press,” broadcast Sunday morning. He responded to a question by NBC’s Tom Brokaw, about why he would not admit that the Bush “surge” had been a success, with the following declaration.

SEN. OBAMA: “... to try to single out one factor in a very messy situation is just not accurate, and it doesn’t, it doesn’t take into account the larger strategic issues that have been at stake throughout this process. Look, we’ve got a finite amount of resources. We’ve got a finite number of troops. Our military is stretched extraordinarily because of trying to fight two wars at the same time. And so my job as the next commander in chief is going to be to make a decision what is the right war to fight, and, and how do we fight it? And I think that we should have been focused on Afghanistan from the start. We should have finished that job.”

Note the sentence: “My job as the next commander in chief is going to be to make a decision what is the right war to fight.”

The American people thus will be given the choice on November 4 of voting for War #1 or War #2, Iraq or Afghanistan. In fact, they will be saddled with both wars, with only slight differences between the Democrats and Republicans over which war should receive the largest proportion of US military resources. Those who oppose American militarism, who want to bring an end to the oppression and violence wrought by imperialist aggression throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, have been disenfranchised by the two big business parties.

In the “Meet the Press” interview, Brokaw touched on the material interests at stake in the Middle East, asking Obama whether, in the case of troops that were withdrawn from Iraq, “those that don’t go to Afghanistan, will they stay in the region and protect Saudi oil fields?” Obama replied that there would be a residual troop deployment in the Persian Gulf, of undetermined size and location.

There has been increasingly open discussion in the American press about the oil interests at the center of the US intervention in Iraq—perhaps whetted by the prospect

that US oil companies may be close to actually cashing in on the dominant US role in the conquered country.

The *Washington Post*, for instance, published two editorials in the recent period declaring that Iraq’s oil reserves were a vital US interest. On July 16, the newspaper attacked Obama’s speech on Iraq delivered the day before, which reaffirmed his support for a 16-month timetable to remove US combat troops. Criticizing his claim that Iraq was a distraction from larger strategic interests, the *Post* wrote: “That’s an irrational and ahistorical way to view a country at the strategic center of the Middle East, with some of the world’s largest oil reserves. Whether or not the war was a mistake, Iraq’s future is a vital U.S. security interest. If he is elected president, Mr. Obama sooner or later will have to tailor his Iraq strategy to that reality.”

A second editorial on July 23 praised Obama for taking a more flexible position on Iraq, but criticized his claim that Afghanistan should be the real “central front” for US military operations. It concluded with the following remarkably blunt assertion: “While the United States has an interest in preventing the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban, the country’s strategic importance pales beside that of Iraq, which lies at the geopolitical center of the Middle East and contains some of the world’s largest oil reserves.”

Here is the undisguised voice of American imperialism. Let’s cut out all the twaddle about fighting terrorism and avenging the 9/11 attacks, the *Post* is saying. That’s good to bamboozle the American people, but no president can take that seriously. The real issue is securing control of a country “which lies at the geopolitical center of the Middle East and contains some of the world’s largest oil reserves.”

Those who sincerely want to carry out a struggle against imperialist war must recognize that it is impossible to separate the military atrocities perpetrated by the Pentagon from the socio-economic interests of the ruling class that send the US military into battle. The struggle against imperialist war requires a political struggle against the profit system as a whole. This means mobilizing the working class as an independent political force, on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact