

New York Times bares Obama's campaign lies on Iraq war

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In an article buried on page 35 of its main news section, the *New York Times* Thursday provided a candid analysis of the glaring contradiction between the antiwar sentiments to which Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama appealed in the run-up to the November election and the actual policies that President-elect Obama is preparing to implement come January.

The article, written by *Times* Pentagon correspondent Thom Shanker, is entitled "Campaign promises on ending the war in Iraq now muted by reality." This headline belies the real situation, as the "reality" of the Iraq war has not changed in any fundamental way in the month since the American people went to the polls.

Rather what has taken place—in a manner that is breathtaking for both its speed and blatancy—is Obama's repudiation of his campaign pledge to end the Iraq war, which proved decisive in his victories in both the Democratic primary contest and the general election itself.

Of course, for those who listened closely, this pledge was always severely hedged, by Obama's statements about leaving a "residual force" in the occupied country and listening to recommendations by US military commanders. But, in the campaign itself, these caveats were overshadowed by his continuous criticism of the Bush administration over the war and his indictment of his principal rival for the Democratic presidential nomination, Hillary Clinton, for her October 2002 vote authorizing the invasion of Iraq.

Now, as the *Times* article spells out, this relationship has been reversed. Obama has ditched the rhetorical promises of his campaign and these previous caveats have emerged clearly as the "reality" of his policy. It is the continuation of the war and occupation in Iraq as well as the essential strategy of using military force to

assert US hegemony over the oil resources of the region.

While Obama "electrified and motivated his liberal base by vowing to 'end the war' in Iraq," the *Times* states, as the transition advances he is now singing a very different tune. The president-elect is "making clearer than ever that tens of thousands of American troops will be left behind in Iraq, even if he can make good on his campaign promise to pull all combat forces out within 16 months."

As the article makes clear, "combat troops" is a term of art, or in the case of the Obama campaign, of deception. Only 15 out of 50 brigade-strength units now deployed in the occupied country are formally classified as "combat" troops. The rest are considered "support" units, though large sections of them are armed and participate in combat operations.

Moreover, as the article makes clear, the semantic difference between combat and non-combat units offers Obama an even easier way to formally fulfill his campaign pledge while continuing the war and occupation that millions of those who voted for him believed he would end.

"Pentagon planners say that it is possible that Mr. Obama's goal could be accomplished at least in part by relabeling some units, so that those currently counted as combat troops could be 're-missioned,' their efforts redefined as training and support for the Iraqis," Shanker reports.

"Mr. Obama was careful to say that the drawdowns he was promising included only combat troops," he writes. "But supporters who keyed on the language of ending the war might be forgiven if they thought that would mean bringing home all of the troops."

This is a rather delicate way of saying that Obama's antiwar rhetoric was from the outset deliberately misleading, designed to con the millions of Americans

who went to the polls with the aim of voting to stop the war.

As for Obama's 16-month deadline for withdrawing "combat" forces from Iraq, the *Times* reports that Pentagon planners are currently drawing up projections for up to 70,000 US troops continuing the occupation not only well past May 2010, but also long after the supposed December 31, 2011 deadline for a full withdrawal established under the recently concluded status of forces agreement reached between Washington and its client regime in Baghdad. It is generally believed that this deadline will be annulled in subsequent negotiations.

The real policy of the incoming Obama administration was made quite clear last Monday at the Chicago press conference in which the president-elect formally announced that Hillary Clinton—whom he excoriated during the Democratic primary campaign for supporting the Iraq war—was his nominee for secretary of state and that Robert Gates—Bush's appointee as defense secretary, who has publicly stated that US troops will remain in Iraq for years to come—will be kept at his post.

He used the occasion to stress the distinction between "combat troops" and the "residual force" and to make clear that he would listen to the advice of Gates and uniformed commanders in setting the pace for even a partial withdrawal.

The Republican right hailed Obama's performance. In a column published in the *Washington Post* Friday, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a prominent adviser of the Bush administration, praised the cabinet choices, writing, "It took courage for the president-elect to choose this constellation." He particularly commended the retention of Gates, calling him "the guarantor of continuity."

Then there is Charles Krauthammer, the right-wing columnist for the *Post* who was a prominent supporter of the invasion of Iraq, as well as of a new war against Iran. "That's the kind of change I can believe in," he declared on Fox News Monday. "It is, I'm sure, a disappointment to his left," he added. "But even more disturbing, I'll bet, is what he said about Iraq."

As the *Times* article accurately reports: "To date, there has been no significant criticism from the antiwar left of the Democratic Party of the prospect that Mr. Obama will keep tens of thousands of troops in Iraq for

at least several years to come."

Indeed, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), the most prominent antiwar protest outfit, has issued a series of statements for a national conference it is holding next weekend in which it hails "the new excitement and hope that the election of Barack Obama brings," without saying a word about the Democratic president-elect's clear signals that he intends to continue a war and occupation that has killed over 1 million Iraqis and claimed the lives of more than 4,200 US troops.

Organizations such as UFPJ are entirely subordinated to the Democratic Party. They played a subsidiary role in diverting the American people's overwhelming opposition to the war behind the Democratic wing of US imperialism.

Even before Obama takes office, the transition process has made it clear that the struggle against war can only be waged as a struggle against the Democratic Party and the Obama administration, by building an independent political party of the working class, directed at the capitalist profit system, the source of militarism.

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