

With Iraq plan, Obama embraces US militarism

Patrick Martin
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In extending the full-scale US occupation of Iraq for another 18 months, and acceding to the timetable already adopted by the Bush administration for a tentative pullout by the end of 2011, President Barack Obama has done more than betray the hopes of the millions of antiwar voters who supported his candidacy in 2008.

He has fully identified the incoming Democratic Party administration with the fraudulent arguments employed by the Bush White House to justify the ongoing war in Iraq, after its initial claims about "weapons of mass destruction" and ties between Iraq and the 9/11 terrorist attacks had been proven to be lies.

Obama's speech to thousands of Marines at Camp Lejeune was an effort to legitimize the US conquest and occupation of Iraq and present the American military as an instrument of liberation rather than imperialist war and oppression.

While candidate Obama described the Iraq war as one that "should never have been authorized and never been waged," President Obama gave a much different reading. "You have fought against tyranny and disorder," he told the assembled troops. "You have bled for your best friends and for unknown Iraqis. And you have borne an enormous burden for your fellow citizens, while extending a precious opportunity to the people of Iraq."

No one would know from this effusive description that the US intervention's main effect upon "unknown Iraqis" was to kill, maim and displace them. Some 1 million people have died since the US invasion in March 2003, including hundreds of thousands killed by US bombs, missiles and shells fired at civilian neighborhoods. Countless Iraqi civilians have been murdered at US checkpoints for the crime of not

slowing down quickly enough.

As for the "precious opportunity" allegedly extended to the people of Iraq, it is the right to vote for parties and politicians sponsored by the US occupation regime to preside over a society that has been virtually destroyed.

Nearly six years after the US conquest, Iraq still does not have running water, electricity, adequate sewage and other necessities of modern life; unemployment is estimated at 50 percent of the adult population; there are some 4 million refugees in internal or external exile; and most Iraqi cities are divided into ethnic and religion-based neighborhoods separated by blast walls and checkpoints.

Obama did not acknowledge, let alone disavow, the real motive for the US military onslaught—Iraq's vast oil wealth and strategic position at the center of the Middle East. That silence only demonstrates that the new president shares the fundamental goal of his predecessor, to strengthen the grip of American imperialism over the Middle East and Central Asia, source of the bulk of the world's oil and gas supplies.

This fact was immediately recognized by the most fervent defenders of the Bush administration's aggression, including Senator John McCain, Obama's Republican opponent in the presidential election, other congressional Republicans, and the right-wing press. The *Wall Street Journal*, for instance editorialized in praise of Obama's Camp Lejeune speech, calling it "Obama's Bush Vindication."

The *Journal* gushed: "Mr. Obama delivered a sober speech, offering a policy worthy of the Commander in Chief he now is." It singled out "Mr. Obama's implicit repudiation of his own positions as a candidate" by agreeing to keep a large US military presence in Iraq, as many as 50,000 troops, after the nominal August

2010 withdrawal date, an action that seeks to maintain "the strategic advantage" of a US puppet regime in the Persian Gulf.

As Obama explained in his speech, a major reason for the redeployment of some US forces out of Iraq is to have sufficient military power available to confront both "the challenge of refocusing on Afghanistan and Pakistan," and "comprehensive American engagement across the region."

Millions of Americans voted for Obama, not because they believed that the war in Iraq was a distraction from the pursuit of broader imperialist goals, but because they regarded the unprovoked invasion and conquest of a sovereign nation as a crime, and opposed the predatory character of American foreign policy as a whole.

Their voices have not the slightest impact on the formulation of policy in the Obama White House. As the events of last week demonstrate, it is the military-intelligence apparatus that calls the shots here. Obama did not make an independent decision as commander-in-chief, but rubber-stamped the course backed by one faction of the military establishment against the other.

According to press accounts that followed Obama's speech at Camp Lejeune, the 19-month "withdrawal" plan selected by Obama was the preferred option of Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Gates confirmed, in an interview Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press", that the Iraq field commanders, headed by Gen. Raymond Odierno, preferred a 23-month schedule for withdrawal, while the Pentagon brass, concerned about the need for troops in Afghanistan and being stretched too thin to engage in other potential conflicts, opted for the shorter timeframe.

Obama did not replace any of the Bush administration's principal military decision makers when he took office. Instead, he retained Gates, Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Odierno and General David Petraeus, head of the US Central Command and architect of the "surge" in Iraq.

His embrace of militarism was demonstrated in the very fact that Obama chose to give the speech at a Marine base to an audience of uniformed troops, not in a civilian setting or through a televised White House address. The effect was to suggest that in the America

of 2009, decisions on war and peace are of concern primarily to the military, with the American people relegated to the role of bystanders.

The whole process demonstrates the erosion of American democracy. The American people cannot, through voting in election after election, effect any change in the foreign and military policy of the government. The war in Iraq goes on, and the war in Afghanistan is being escalated, regardless of popular sentiments.

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