

Bipartisan Consensus: Iraq, Many More Years of War

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After a few skirmishes, congressional Democrats have fled the field of battle with the Republicans over the matter of withdrawing some U.S. troops from Iraq. Ending the war itself was never a serious part of the several-month debate, although many Americans thought it was.

A consensus seems to be building in Washington that views a long term U.S. military presence in Iraq as a valuable geostrategic asset in the quest for regional and global hegemony. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is now talking about an occupation of an unlimited number of years with a minimum of 40,000 U.S. troops. The Democratic Party and the majority of its politicians in Congress are expected to go along with this.

The Democratic leadership has declared it now seeks compromise with the Bush Administration and Republicans in Congress, and isn't willing to force the issue of troop withdrawal. Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama and John Edwards < leading candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination > have all been quoted as suggesting that the war will not end for at least five-and-a-half more years (the end of the new presidential term). According to a Sept. 29 article in the Washington Post, the important question for these candidates "is no longer whether U.S. forces will remain in Iraq but what size, mission and length a post-buildup [post-surge], post-Bush force would take on."

It also appears that the centrist majority of the Democratic delegation in the House and Senate is committed to keeping a large contingent of American troops in Iraq at least as long as Clinton, Obama and Edwards predict. Public opinion polls in September showed that only 5% of the American people want the troops to remain that long, but they will be ignored unless a great deal more pressure is exerted by the American people and the U.S. peace movement.

Democratic leaders will make efforts to convince the voters throughout the year leading to the 2008 elections that they are doing their best to bring U.S. troops home. But it will be for show, in order to propel a Democrat into the White House on the basis of antiwar opinion.

Democratic House and Senate leaders, Rep. Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Harry Reid, claim that the threat of a Republican filibuster and a veto from President George W. Bush constitute a double whammy preventing the Democratic majority in both houses of Congress from passing legislation to withdraw the U.S. Army of Occupation from Iraq.

At best, this argument is disingenuous. All the Democrats in Congress need do is exercise their constitutional right to withhold funds to continue the war, allocating monies only for the swift withdrawal of all American troops. A majority can do it. In the Senate, if the Democrats can't accumulate 51 votes, all they'd need is 41 to mount a filibuster which

would prevent the funding bill from being called for a vote. The refusal to attempt such action is an indication that the Democrats have other plans in mind. The Democratic congressional leadership insists de-funding would be unpopular with the voters and may cost them the election. But that is misleading.

Once the March 2003 invasion began, the Democratic Party has been as committed as the Republicans to winning the Iraq war, despite the antiwar views of a small minority of legislators within its ranks. Democratic leaders think they can conduct the war better than the blundering Bush Administration. Winning in Iraq was their position in the 2004 election with John Kerry and it is their position now. The difference is that Democratic leaders said it openly then and conceal it now because public opinion has changed.

The “peace party,” as the Dems have positioned themselves in the election, talks about withdrawal but the fact is that its most extreme proposal has been for a gradual and partial withdrawal that would keep up to 50,000 American troops in Iraq for many years. With them would be a huge number of mercenaries and tens of thousands of civilians now providing services that the military used to handle just a decade ago.

The U.S. will wind up spending some \$2 trillion dollars on the Iraq project if it ends in a couple of years, and much more if it lasts a decade or so, as seems likely. Washington will not simply walk away from an investment of this size. There is too much at stake, including control over one of the largest reserves of petroleum under the Earth, and America's domination of the entire Middle East.

Here, in our view, is the Democratic leadership's simultaneous two-stage prescription for “victory” in Iraq:

1. After a Democrat becomes the next president, they will begin the process of partial withdrawal over several years. This will reduce popular opposition, even as hostilities continue. After a year or two, as Iraqi troops play more of a front-line role, the number of US. casualties will drop considerably, further eroding the demand for an end to the war.
2. During this time, the U.S. will fund, train, field and control the huge Iraqi army so that it does most of the fighting. The Pentagon will back it up with tens of thousands of U.S. Special Forces and other troops stationed in impregnable bases and supported by a vast expansion of American air power. Buy off as much of the opposition as possible. Promise to invest in rebuilding part of the infrastructure. Create an informal but effective separation of Iraq into three parts < Kurd, Shia, Sunni < to reduce communal strife. Maintain control over whatever Iraq government it is convenient to put in power and direct affairs, as now, from Washington. Bring in the UN as cover.

There are other aspects to Washington's triumph in an unjust war, but these are key. If it works, the U.S. military will remain in Iraq for many years. How many? How about 10 to 50 years?

The U.S. has stationed almost 40,000 troops, missiles, bombers and nuclear weapons in South Korea for over a half century, and they are not about to leave despite the so-called “shortage” of American troops in Iraq. “Protecting” South Korea is not the reason. The existence of substantial U.S. military power an hour or two away from China, Russia and Japan is a major forward thrust in the geostrategic drive for world hegemony.

Maintaining a powerful military force in the client state of Iraq for decades will be an even more important geostrategic maneuver, if it works out. One reason, as former Federal Reserve boss Alan Greenspan let slip in his new book, is that ³the Iraq war is largely about oil.² Of course it is, but there¹s more.

The U.S. seeks to become so powerfully entrenched in Iraq that it is given first grabs at the oil for a reasonable price, plus influence over who else gets the oil. This is why the Congress and the White House are demanding that Baghdad agree to the ³benchmark² about denationalizing the oil fields and allowing U.S. companies to earn super profits for extracting and delivering this strategic commodity. When the corporations get in and the oil starts flowing, naturally they will have to be protected by reliable American forces.

The geostrategic reason for Washington to remain a politically and militarily dominant force in Iraq is to facilitate the extension of U.S. hegemony throughout the Middle East, with Russia and China very much in mind.

The U.S. is engaged in an undeclared new cold war with both China and the revived, Putin-era Russia. The principal area of contention between Beijing and Moscow on the one hand, and Washington on the other, is that both China and Russia are aligned in opposing the concept of a unipolar world order wherein the United States operates as the dominating superpower and world cop, as it has done since the Soviet downfall.

The alternative is a multipolar system where several countries or regions operate as essentially equal powers, with the UN playing a larger role. Washington rejects, and suggests it will fight against, any erosion in its dominant unipolar position. This contradiction will be resolved in the next decades, one way or the other. In an important speech Oct. 15, Chinese President Hu Jintao declared that the ³trend toward a multipolar world is irreversible.²

The U.S. will be empowered significantly in this geostrategic struggle if it can sufficiently control the oil-rich states of the Middle East to the point of influencing which outside states can and cannot purchase or drill for the region¹s oil. With influence such as this, first in Iraq and then the region, the U.S. will guarantee itself abundant supplies of this vital but diminishing energy resource for many decades to come. In the process this will reduce its own dependence on certain politically problematic sources such as Venezuela.

Washington believes that its European allies are becoming too dependant on oil and natural gas from Russia. Should America¹s plans for the Middle East succeed, enough oil could be made available to the European Union/NATO countries at attractive prices to draw them away from Moscow. Naturally such a circumstance would make the Europeans more dependent on America in exchange.

China comes into the picture because of a desperate need for energy resources to continue its role as the world¹s manufacturing resource, as well as a requirement to satisfy the domestic needs of a population four times larger than the United States. With decisive influence over the disposition of the world¹s largest oil fields, Washington could threaten to prevent China¹s access to Middle East oil should push come to shove over Beijing¹s economic power and the unipolar issue. China seeks Russian oil, but would be reluctant to become principally dependent on Moscow¹s energy supplies. Each is a proud and important nation seeking an independent place in the sun, and wary of falling under the other¹s shadow.

A large, permanent garrison in Iraq will transport Washington closer to its geopolitical goals. A presence of this magnitude will allow the U.S. to militarily threaten Iran, Syria, and Lebanon whenever “necessary” It will further bolster Israel, and enhance U.S. control of the region while extending its reach closer to southern Russia.

These are the main reasons we believe Washington’s intention is a long occupation in Iraq and why there will be little real opposition from the Democratic or Republican parties. The war has been bipartisan from the day it began and, aside from salvos of unpleasant rhetoric, probably will remain so under a somewhat different configuration with a Democratic president in the White House.

Washington may never attain its long range objectives, of course. The Pentagon’s Army of Occupation and its creation, the ³Iraqi² army, may never be able to ³stabilize² Iraq, and the situation will continue to worsen. The American people, already sick of the war, may see through the phased, partial withdrawal scheme, and recognize it for what it is: a mechanism for continuing the war for years to come.

The U.S. antiwar movement, in combination with public opinion, may be able to frustrate the plans for a long occupation. But its many components will have to be far more politically savvy, united in action, independent of the two ruling parties, and willing to escalate its confrontation with whoever the powers may be. At this stage it appears that a large sector of the peace forces, while still calling for withdrawal, will mainly spend next year seeking to elect Democrats in the 2008 elections.

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