

Phase III of Bush's War

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Those who hoped that — with the victory of the antiwar party in 2006, the departure of Rumsfeld and the neocons from the Pentagon, the rise of Condi and the eclipse of Cheney — America was headed out of Iraq got a rude awakening. They are about to get another.

Today, the United States has 30,000 more troops in Iraq than on the day America repudiated the Bush war policy and voted the GOP out of power. And President Bush, self-confidence surging, is now employing against Iran a bellicosity redolent of the days just prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

What gives Bush his new cockiness? The total collapse of the antiwar coalition on Capitol Hill and the breaking of the Congress.

Last spring, Bush vetoed the congressional deadlines for troop withdrawals, then rubbed Congress' nose in its defeat by demanding and getting \$100 billion to support the surge and continue the war.

Before the August recess, Democrats broke again and voted to give Bush the warrantless wiretap authority many among them had said was an unconstitutional and impeachable usurpation of power. They are a broken and frightened lot.

Comes now evidence congressional Democrats have not only lost the pro-victory vote, but forfeited the peace vote, as well.

According to a Zogby poll the last week in August, just two weeks before Gen. Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker report, Americans, by 45 percent to 20 percent, give this Democratic Congress lower grades on handling the war than the Republican Congress it replaced.

Fifty-four percent of the nation believes, contra Harry Reid, the war is not lost. That is twice the support that Bush enjoys for his war leadership, a paltry 27 percent. But, by nine to one, Bush's leadership on the war is preferred to that of the Congress of Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid.

Incredibly, only 3 percent of the nation gives Congress a positive rating on its handling of the war. Congress has lost the hawks, and the owls, and the doves. No one trusts its leadership on the war.

And George W. smells it. He no longer fears the power of Congress, and his rhetoric suggests he is contemptuous of it. He is brimming with self-assurance that he can break any Democratic attempt to impose deadlines for troop withdrawal and force Congress to cough up all the funds he demands.

Confident of victory this fall on the Hill, Bush is now moving into Phase III in his War on Terror: First, Afghanistan, then Iraq, then Iran.

Do not take this writer's word for it. Harken to the astonishing rhetoric Bush used at the American Legion Convention in Las Vegas against Tehran:

"Iran ... is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. ... Iran funds terrorist groups like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which murder the innocent and target Israel. ... Iran is sending arms to the Taliban. ... Iran has arrested visiting American scholars who have committed no crimes. ... Iran's active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons threatens to put a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust.

"Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere. ... We will confront this danger before it is too late."

Bush has repeatedly warned Iran to cease supplying Iraqi insurgents with arms and enhanced IEDs for attacks on our troops in Iraq.

How has Tehran responded to Bush's virtual ultimatums?

"The attacks on our bases and our troops by Iranian-supplied munitions have increased in the last few months — despite pledges by Iran to help stabilize the security situation in Iraq. ...

"Iran's leaders cannot escape responsibility for aiding attacks against coalition forces and the murder of innocent Iraqis."

This is a case for war. Indeed, it's an assertion by President Bush that Iran is colluding in acts of war against the soldiers and Marines and allies of the United States. What does he intend to do?

"I have authorized our military commanders in Iraq to confront Tehran's murderous activities. ... We've conducted operations against Iranian agents supplying lethal munitions to extremist groups."

This suggests that U.S. forces may already be engaged in combat operations against Iranians.

Who or what can stop this drive to war?

Last spring, Nancy Pelosi herself, after a call from the Israeli lobby, pulled an amendment that would have forced Bush to come to Congress for specific authorization before attacking Iran. Before the August recess, the Senate voted 97 to zero for a resolution sponsored by Joe Lieberman to censure Iran for complicity in the killing of U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

The resolution explicitly rejected authorization for immediate military action, but the gist of it declared that Iran is participating in acts of war against the United States, laying the foundation for a confrontation.

What is to prevent Bush from attacking Iran and widening the war, at a time and place of his choosing, and sooner than we think?

Nothing and no one.

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