

A Loud Silence

"Antiwar" Democrats and Obama's Iraq Policy

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Is it really possible that President-elect Barack Obama intends to break his campaign promise to “end the war” in Iraq, and keep US troops in that country well beyond the [sixteen month timetable](#) for withdrawal he advocated during the campaign?

The answer, according to the New York Times, is a fairly certain [yes](#):

“On the campaign trail, Senator Barack Obama offered a pledge that electrified and motivated his liberal base, vowing to “end the war” in Iraq.

“But as he moves closer to the White House, President-elect Obama 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.

“‘I said that I would remove our combat troops from Iraq in 16 months, with the understanding that it might be necessary — likely to be necessary — to maintain a residual force to provide potential training, logistical support, to protect our civilians in Iraq,’ Mr. Obama said this week as he introduced his national security team.”

Tens of thousands – a [prime target](#) for terrorists, a “residual force” that, in any other context, would be seen as an army of occupation, and a reminder to the Iraqis that they still aren’t free of us, nor we of them. That “residual” force, we are told, could number as high as 70,000 troops “for a substantial time even beyond 2011.” At a cost of billions, to be sure.

This is not “ending” the war.

The retention of [Gates](#), the appointment of [Hillary the Hawk](#), the “[team of rivals](#)” gambit that is [supposed](#) to inoculate Obama against criticism from the pro-war right – this pre-inaugural political drama is a dress rehearsal for betrayal. Antiwar voters, who [put Obama in office](#), are about to get screwed – and their alleged spokespersons, at least amongst the left-wing punditariat, are bending over with alacrity. Somebody please tell Rachel Maddow to drop the “[quackitude](#),” and reorient her own attitude – because she soon won’t have George W. Bush to kick around anymore. The ball is in her court – and in [Keith Olbermann](#)’s, if he can only remember to take his meds.

My guess, however, is that they’ll miss the basket by a mile. After all, it looks like GE Capital – a division of General Electric, corporate parent of MSNBC – [has got their bailout](#) to the tune of untold billions. Unlike the blue-collar types, like General Motors and the UAW, they didn’t have to come crawling to Congress, hat in hand, with a plan to show what they’re going to do with the money. It was payment for [services rendered](#): thanks for your business, and

please come again.

There's no accountability from this crowd. Forget the pretentious rhetoric about "inclusion," and the alleged sanctity of the "democratic process." The only kind of populism these folks understand is the kind that's packaged and sold by Madison Avenue, for the benefit of Wall Street.

From all the formerly outraged "antiwar" personalities in the media and politics, we hear nothing in response to Obama's preemptive betrayal – carried out before he even takes office – except a very [loud and embarrassing silence](#).

Where is the ever-voluble [Arianna Huffington](#)? Busy choosing her wardrobe for the Inaugural Ball. And Rachel's so focused on getting [Susan](#) into the inaugural after-party at the White House that such mundane matters as the [continuing occupation](#) of Iraq shrink into well-deserved insignificance. As for Keith Olbermann, I hear he's demanding GE Capital's bailout check be made out directly to him. After all, he's [earned it](#) – they've all earned it.

It's been remarked before that Team Obama is a [re-run](#) of the Clinton administration, as far as appointments are concerned, but there's been less attention paid to what this actually means, stylistically: the return of the old [Clintonian trick](#) of redefining words to fit the circumstances. Get ready for more lectures on what the true meaning of the word "is" is. They're going to redefine us out of Iraq, whilst leaving the occupation intact, by [re-labeling military personnel](#) and "changing the mission." Since the mission is being reduced to specific tasks, like force protection, these will no longer be "combat troops." They'll be something else – but not, technically, an occupying force. Or, at least, that is what MSNBC will no doubt be reporting as fact.

The moral slackness, the complete lack of perspective, and of course the [boundless arrogance](#) – it's all coming back to Washington. So when did it ever [leave](#)? Well, then, expect a ratcheting up, at the very least, of all the worst aspects of the old Clinton administration, especially in the foreign policy realm. These people have forgotten where they've come from so quick that, in a few months, they'll be acting just like their predecessors: [warlike](#), [imperious](#), and [ready to rumble](#). As far as the future of American foreign policy is concerned, I have only three words to say: watch out, Pakistan!

So where is the left, anyway?

[Glenn Greenwald](#), among the best of the liberals, is AWOL on Obama's foreign policy sellout. Sure, torture is bad, and it's very noble to be against it, I'm sure, but what about the endless war that gives it a conceptual framework and legitimizes it in the name of "national security"?

Where are the "antiwar" liberals? They're on their way to the Inauguration, and you'll have to pardon them if they slam the door of the limousine in our faces.

Okay, so what about the commies? As obnoxious and outright crazy as they can be, surely they are sufficiently sincere and consistent in their opposition to US imperialism to resist the lure of Obama-mania.

Well, not exactly ... because, you see, unfortunately, they don't make commies like they used to. Take, for example, the softcore Communist party types who lord it over the main

antiwar “coalition,” [United for Peace and Justice](#). These are old-style CPUSA types, whose subservience to the Democratic party is a matter of longstanding doctrine, and whose hopes for “Popular Front” with the incoming administration fit in quite well with the Obama-as-Roosevelt narrative the left is playing in their heads.

The war in Iraq? As they say in the Big Apple, fuggeddaboutit! The Communist Party of Iraq [supports](#) the American occupation, and has from the beginning. The endless “withdrawal” from Iraq can be glossed over in the name of getting out “responsibly.”

The war in Afghanistan? One hardly expects much sympathy, in these quarters, for a people that defeated the Soviet Union and arguably brought about its downfall. As for Obama, in [a statement](#) on his election victory they take credit for his success:

“For more than six years, United For Peace and Justice and the antiwar movement have stood firm in our opposition to the war in Iraq. Our consistent work played a major role in turning public sentiment against the war, and that sentiment helped lay the foundation for the Obama campaign’s success.”

You’ll note that there’s no mention of Afghanistan, until much later, and then only in an ambiguous context. After all, these people consider themselves part of the team – Obama’s team:

“Obama has put forth the challenge and United For Peace and Justice is ready to meet that challenge as we work to change our nation’s path from militarism and greed to peace and justice.”

The real challenge these leftist appendages of the Obama administration face is explaining to their own supporters how and why [we’re still going to be in Iraq](#) at the end of Obama’s first term. In the meantime, however, they can gush over their multiculti messiah and even take credit for his election – and forget about all those tiresome antiwar demonstrations. I see they’re holding a “National Assembly” soon, which is going to [discuss](#) their new strategic orientation: their last such document professed to “stay alert” to the threat of an expanded war in Afghanistan, as well as reiterating UFPJ’s opposition to the occupation of Iraq. But actions speak louder than words: where are the relatively large demonstrations of the Bush era?

I see no indication of any such action anywhere, not even from the [Marcyites](#), who made a profession out of mounting these marches. However, they seem to have [split](#) into [two factions](#), the [most](#) active of which is [preoccupied](#) with calling for a government “bailout” for “workers”, freeing Mumia, and [calling for](#) a National Day of Mourning on Thanksgiving – a public relations triumph in Bizarro World, from what I hear.

This loud silence from the ostensibly antiwar Left is all the more inexplicable given the fact that they’re right: Obama [does](#) owe his election in large part to their efforts, which helped turn public opinion against the crazed foreign policy of the Bush White House. From a raucous crowd that wouldn’t shut up, to a mobilization of [Trappists](#) – that’s the current and very curious trajectory of the “official” antiwar movement in America.

The irony of this strange paralysis is that there never was a better time for them to get out the old placards, unfurl the banners, and [take to the streets](#) with their demands – after all, this is a President who listens to them, presumably. I never understood the logic of

demonstrating in front of the Bush White House: after all, that's the last place anybody would be sympathetic. This, however, is a White House of a different color, so to speak. Having taken credit for electing Obama, what's to stop antiwar demonstrators from asking for a little something in return? They can do it respectfully: like Russian peasants supplicating the Czar.

Sooner or later, the antiwar movement will have to respond, as the Afghan front [takes center stage](#) in our [perpetual](#) "war on terrorism," and the War Party [digs its spurs](#) into the hindquarters of the national security bureaucracy, which actually administers and implements American foreign policy. The quick [extension](#) of the conflict into Pakistan by the Obama administration is another development we have to look forward to, complete with an Indo-American alliance and the ratcheting up of regional tensions. China, Russia, and Iran all have legitimate cause for concern.

We are entering a very dangerous time, as everyone's attention is diverted away from the field of foreign affairs while the economy [melts down](#). However, war is often seen as the "solution" to our economic problems. The popular [myth](#) that war is good for the economy has been concretized by the doctrine of "[military Keynesianism](#)." After all, if government spending of any sort is the best way to kick-start the economy, then why not more military spending to create government-guaranteed jobs and keep the bubble expanding?

I note that the UFPJ statement comes out strongly against "militarism." I have news for them: they haven't seen anything yet.

Another enemy, another crusade, another "necessary" war that requires the production of arms and the militarization of labor – just like the "[good war](#)" did. If Obama is indeed a post-racial version of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as the lefties hope, then it becomes ever more important to keep a very close watch on his foreign policy. After all, [Clare Booth Luce](#) was [dead on right](#) when she said of FDR: "He lied us into war." Whether it was for our own good, as historians like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., aver, is an issue the Rachel Maddows and Keith Olbermanns of this world will have to face in the very near future. And, correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm certain I know which side they'll come out on....

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