

Fake Congressional Opposition to War

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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The US electorate sent a clear, unequivocal message in the November mid-term elections. End the Iraq war and bring home the troops. Many supporting war in the 109th Congress lost out to more moderate voices taking over their seats because voters want change and expect new faces to deliver starting with the top issue on voters' minds in recent polls - Iraq. A majority of the public demands it, protests and heated rhetoric continue building over it, and the Congress is about to disappoint again proving getting into war is easy but even an act of Congress can't get us out because doing nothing is less risky than taking a stand against the prevailing view in Washington.

So the best this Congress can offer is non-binding stuff with no meaning and a wishy binding proposal rolled out March 8 guaranteeing support for the war with billions more spending than the administration wants. It also sets a timetable for partial withdrawal far enough in the future to be laughable. It proves again expecting elections to change things in Washington is like betting on an early end to winter in Chicago. Hope springs eternal but never fails to disappoint.

The House proved it February 16 sending a pathetic non-binding no-action message repudiating the administration's decision to "surge" more troops to Iraq showing its spirit lay in its rhetoric, not in its actions where it counts. The floor language was long, loud and toothless with pieties from House Speaker Pelosi saying "We owe our troops a course of action in Iraq that is worthy of their sacrifice" but failing to provide one. So much for resolve. The Senate was even more non-binding than the House failing for second time February 17 even to pass a procedural measure to allow for a full vote on a resolution opposing more troops guaranteed to make things worse as they're sent. Once again with chips on the line, both Houses of Congress show party member profiles in courage are as rare as ones with honor and integrity or like finding a friend in a city Harry Truman once complained about saying if you want one in Washington, "get a dog."

Politics, Washington-style proves again campaign promises are empty, the criminal class is bipartisan, and the atmosphere is charged with empty rhetoric and business as usual. Instead of ending the war, Democrats propose continued war with more funding in new legislation sounding like an old Miller Lite commercial. Their plan is drafted to sound good, but not be fulfilling as it won't work and won't pass both Houses or override a presidential veto signaled by White House spokesman Dan Bartlett saying...."it's safe to say it's a nonstarter for the president." So much for Democrat intentions, good or otherwise.

The new legislation calls for withdrawing US combat troops beginning no later than 120 days following passage of legislation to be completed by September 1, 2008 in the House version and suggests March 31, 2008 only as a goal in the Senate proposal. It also calls for George Bush to certify Iraq's "government" is progressing toward established "benchmarks" July 1

and October 1 leaving that judgment to a president always claiming progress in the face of clear evidence on the ground proving otherwise.

Left out of the proposal is what Democrats like John Murtha (no dove) and other so-called “moderates” in the party wanted in it to prevent further escalation of war:

- A call for a political, not military solution to the conflict.
- Changing the military’s mission to training, logistical support and “target(ing) anti-terrorism operations.”
- Requiring the Pentagon to abide by combat readiness and training standards to include proper equipment and enough time for recuperation.
- Language prohibiting no further war funding after September 1, 2008.
- Mandating deployment extensions not exceed 365 days for the Army and 210 days for Marine units. Unmentioned is why should there be any let alone what right have we to be there in the first place.

— On March 12 the Democrat leadership backed off further announcing their proposal will exclude any limitation on Bush’s unilateral right to attack Iran, including with nuclear weapons, bowing to the demands of the Israeli Lobby and Republican hawks.

When it emerges in final form, legislation from both Houses will be another lesson in Politics 101 – same old, same old meaning both parties in both Houses support imperialism on the march, and Congress will do nothing to stop it, rhetoric aside intended only to soothe, comfort and again deceive the electorate.

This proposal gives George Bush unrestricted power to continue waging war masquerading beneath rhetoric to curtail him. It provides near-unlimited continued funding giving him cover in the name of national security to act as he pleases, placing no restraint on his deploying as many additional combat brigades and support troops as he wants, with no restrictions on how long they’ll remain. It also allows an undetermined number of US forces to stay in Iraq in perpetuity the way they still are in Germany, Japan and South Korea proving when America shows up anywhere we’re not leaving – ever.

Congressional Democrats have also larded their bills with funding for Afghanistan, relocation of US troops from bases in Europe and Asia, homeland security, veterans’ health care (far too little), farm disaster aid, Gulf Coast recovery and flu pandemic preparation in the usual kind of hodge-podge legislation always coming from Congress likely to add still more provisions costing more billions in its final form. In hopes of getting enough votes for passage, this and other small print pork ad-ons lard the bills the usual way things are done on Capitol Hill. No need to guess who picks up the tab.

Congressional Authority to Wage or End Wars

Article I, Section 8 of the US Constitution authorizes only Congress to declare war even though since 1941 it deferred that authority unconstitutionally to the president. Congress also has power to end wars. What it lacks is backbone stiff enough to do it by cutting off funding because it alone controls the federal purse strings. Article I, Section 7, Clause I says: “All bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives; but the Senate

may propose or concur with amendments as on other Bills.” Either House may originate an appropriations bill although the House claims sole authority to do it. Either House may amend bills of any kind including revenue and appropriations ones. Congress may have trouble rescinding funding already approved, but there’s no disputing its power to withhold future amounts without which wars end and troops are withdrawn.

Congressional appropriation power is the key. In the House it resides in the Appropriations Committee and in the Senate with the Committee on Appropriations both charged with the power given it by Article 1, Section 9, Clause 7 of the Constitution saying: “No money shall be drawn from the treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by law; and a regular statement and account of receipts and expenditures of all public money shall be published from time to time.”

This language means only Congress has constitutional power of the purse it alone can authorize by laws both Houses must pass. That includes the federal budget in which spending for wars and all other discretionary and mandatory categories are included (like servicing the federal debt). Only Congress can fund them, and no funding means no spending meaning Congress alone can end the Iraq war if it wishes. Cut off the funds, war and occupation end, and troops come home with or without presidential approval – or at least that’s how it’s supposed to work and has in the past.

How Congress Ended the Vietnam War

Cutting off funds finally ended the Vietnam war after Congress was mostly deferential to presidential authority throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1964, it granted Lyndon Johnson broad authority to use force and provided funding for it. Still, unlike today, some bold legislators then publicly challenged the administration applying some but inadequate budgetary pressure. An early critic was Senator Frank Church who said early on sending troops to Vietnam would be a “hopeless entanglement, the end of which is difficult to see.” Others in Congress agreed but voiced it privately. They included noted senators like William Fulbright, Albert Gore Sr. (the former vice-president’s father), Stuart Symington and Majority Leader Mike Mansfield.

Even Lyndon Johnson was conflicted about the war early on, had doubts on what he was getting into, and privately expressed them in May, 1964 to his best Senate friend Richard Russell in taped Oval Office conversations. He wanted advice about the “Vietnam thing,” Russell called the “damn worse mess I ever saw” warning we weren’t ready to send troops to fight a jungle war. He told Johnson if the option was sending over Americans or get out “I’d get out” and the territory wasn’t a “damn bit” important.

That was three months before the fateful Gulf of Tonkin Resolution empowered the president to wage war without congressional approval which he did while believing and saying the war was unwinnable. It ruined his presidency, shortened his life, and ended it a disgraced, defeated man who once was bigger-than-life as Senate majority leader and then President.

While still in office, the war deteriorated and influential congressional Democrats used their investigatory power to force contentious but ineffective public debate. It began as early as 1966 in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by William Fulbright who no longer could conceal his private opposition to a war he opposed. Hearings went on forcing the administration to face up to budgetary consequences of war and peacetime social program

priorities at a time Johnson's Great Society meant something and included his War on Poverty that would be an unimaginable priority under George Bush.

In 1968, Johnson accepted a \$6 billion budget cut in exchange for a tax surcharge to curb growing inflation that wasn't enough to keep it from getting out of hand later on. He went along with powerful Democrats concerned enough about a "guns and butter" economy to reduce some of the former for their more important domestic agenda. That's impossible today under George Bush and a bipartisan Congress committed to shredding the nation's social safety net for reckless "global war on terrorism (GWOT)" spending meaning wars without end and big profits for their corporate paymaster allies.

Johnson's Great Society had different ideas that continued under Richard Nixon under whom most people forget capital punishment was halted, abortion was legalized, EPA and OSHA were established, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) was created, and the first large-scale integration of public schools in the South began along with normalizing relations with China. Nixon was bad, but not all bad.

But he was baddest of all on Vietnam (not Watergate) as war continued under the Nixon Doctrine. It included the secret war on Cambodia killing hundreds of thousands leading to the rise of the Khmer Rouge Gerald Ford supported as an anti-Soviet ally ignoring their scorched earth policies against their own people. It also continued massive bombing and Vietnamization to let South Vietnamese troops do our killing for us so US forces could withdraw just like today's plan is to let Iraqis do our fighting and dying while we train them inside secured permanent super-bases we won't give up no matter what, or so we say as we did in Vietnam till we did.

Nonetheless, under Johnson and Nixon, Congress reasserted its power of the purse incrementally. It was mostly political posturing in the 1960s, but by June 30, 1970 the Church-Cooper amendment (attached to a supplemental aid bill) passed stipulating no further spending for soldiers, combat assistance, advisors, or bombing operations in Cambodia. It was the first congressional budgetary act limiting funding for the war. Nixon ignored it but others followed leading to the key Church-Clifford Case 1972 Senate amendment attached to foreign aid legislation to end all funding for US military operations in Southeast Asia except for withdrawal subject to the release of prisoners of war. It was the first time either House passed legislation to end all war funding. It was defeated in the House but showed anti-war forces strengthening that in time would prevail.

They finally did in June, 1973 when Congress passed the Church-Case amendment ending all funding after August 15. Congress then overrode a presidential veto passing the War Powers Act (still the law) that year limiting presidential power by requiring the chief executive henceforth to consult Congress before authorizing troop deployments for extended periods. Unlike today, Congress began taking its check and balancing role seriously enough to act, if slowly, to curtail presidential authority and assert its own with the most important power it has – of the purse that forced Richard Nixon to end the Vietnam war. It can do it again today as then but so far shows little inclination or courage with few and rare exceptions, one being a modest effort by Senator Russ Feingold who detailed his position on the Senate floor even though now he's gone wishy on it.

Senator Feingold's Position on Ending the Iraq War

First the good news. Everyone in Congress knows the law, but Feingold had it in mind in

remarks delivered February 16, 2007 on the Senate floor saying people want the war ended, and Congress should stop funding it. On January 31, he introduced the Iraq Redeployment Act of 2007 to force the president to redeploy US forces there by cutting off war funding. He said "We must end our involvement in this tragic and misguided war. The President will not do so. Therefore, Congress must act." The same senator was one of 23 in the upper chamber voting against H.J. Resolution 114 on October 11, 2002 authorizing George Bush to use US Armed Forces against Iraq. On August 17, 2005, he was the first senator calling for withdrawing US forces from the country and a timetable to do it suggesting a completion date of December 31, 2006. He further stated April 27, 2006 he would move to amend emergency appropriations funding of \$106.5 billion requiring troop withdrawal instead. He also introduced a March 13, 2006 Senate resolution to censure George Bush for illegal wiretapping in violation of the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) requiring court approval the president never sought.

Feingold got nowhere, but at least he tried even though his record isn't lilly pure. His end of February comments showed it saying congressional Democrats are beginning to move in the right direction on Iraq. He knew then and now that's false and saying it tarnished his otherwise good intentions. He also praised the flawed March 8 Democrat leadership proposal to continue funding wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with legislative provisions for troop withdrawals by 2008 that's wishful thinking at best.

Nonetheless, Feingold stood tall earlier as the only senator voting against passage of the USA Patriot Act in October, 2001. He also fought its renewal and is now part of a bipartisan congressional minority demanding lawmakers defend our constitutional rights because those on Capitol Hill swore an oath to do it. Further, he opposes the president's right to "surge" new troops to Iraq, believes the notion is flawed and unconvincing, and feels congressional action must go beyond nonbinding resolutions. It must include Congress using "its power of the purse (not about) cutting off funds for troops (but) cutting off funds for war." He rightly believes Congress has constitutional power to do it and wants a strategy for getting them out to be redeployed "within the context of the global fight against al-Quaida....and other international terrorist organizations."

Indeed Feingold isn't true blue, but at least he's got it half right even if he sadly misstates the terrorist threat that's a home-based state-sponsored one inciting people around the world we attack to strike back. Ending the threat is simple as the senator knows. Stop attacking them, and they won't hit back, but keep it up as we do relentlessly, and it guarantees eventual harsh blowback at home and abroad certain to get worse and may become catastrophic in US cities if the administration pursues a plan to attack Iran, with or without nuclear weapons.

Is There An Edward Boland in the House....or the Senate?

Readers may forget his name but should recall his amendment during the 1980s Contra wars when the Reagan administration secretly escalated them. It led to the Iran-Contra scandal in 1986 involving illegal administration arms sales to Iran, then illegally diverting funds from them to US-armed Contra forces adding to what CIA supplied them with through illegal drugs trafficking.

In 1982, the House passed the Boland Amendment as a rider to the Defense Appropriations Act of 1983. It cut off CIA and other intelligence agency Contras funding used against Daniel

Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) that led the popular 1979 revolution ousting the hated US-backed Somoza dictatorship. The bill became law because politicians from both parties were outraged by Ronald Reagan's secret Central American wars undertaken without notifying congressional oversight committees as required. The president went around the restriction, got in trouble doing it, and only escaped criminal responsibility when the Tower (investigating) Commission absolved him other than to blame him for not better supervising his subordinates.

What Congress did in 1982 and during the Vietnam war, it can do now with full constitutional authority backing it. With an administration possibly heading for nuclear war with Iran, Congress must head it off, defund the Iraq war and end our ill-fated adventurism in the Middle East. Some in high places want it, but it remains to be seen what's next and whether a majority in Congress will ever put their legislative powers where their rhetoric is, act before it's too late, and be able to override a certain presidential veto from an administration bent on wars without end for goals impossible to achieve.

Is There An International Lawyer in the House or Senate?

None are needed as lawmakers are duty bound to be law-readers to know and understand the Constitution they swore to uphold "so help them God" who may not sympathize with those using the Almighty's name in vain. That includes knowing Article Six stipulating "This Constitution and the Laws of the United States....and all Treaties made (to which the country is a signatory) shall be the supreme Law of the Land (and) The Senators and Representatives (and) Members of....State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers....are bound by Oath....to support this Constitution (and everything in it so help them or be criminally liable)."

That includes the aforementioned treaties of which the UN Charter is one to which this country is a signatory and bound by its provisions including its Chapter VII. It allows the Security Council to "determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" and if necessary take military or other action to "restore international peace and stability." It permits a nation to use force only under two conditions: when authorized to do it by the Security Council or under Article 51 allowing the "right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member....until the Security Council has taken measures to maintain international peace and security."

No nation attacked this one on 9/11, and no Security Council resolution authorized the US to go to war against Afghanistan or Iraq. In both instances, US military actions were willful and malicious acts of illegal aggression the Nuremberg Charter called the "supreme international crime" above all others making every member of Congress supporting them criminally liable along with George Bush, but who'll hold them to account. It's why no one in Congress ever mentions what should be central to any "debate" on the war and why no mainstream journalists worthy of their profession have courage to remind them.

There's no reminder either that Article One, Section 8, Clause 11 of the Constitution gives Congress alone power to declare war so presidents never have sole authority to do it. It's how the Founders wanted it as James Madison wrote in 1793 that the "fundamental doctrine of the Constitution....to declare war is fully and exclusively vested in the legislature." And George Mason stated during the constitutional convention the president "is not safely to be trusted with" the power to declare war. Sadly it hasn't worked out that way. The president and Congress only observed the supreme law of the land five times in the nation's history,

the last being in December, 1941 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Following WW II, Harry Truman criminally broke the law setting a post-war precedent his successors followed, and no Congress intervened to stop them. It made every post-war president criminally liable but none more so than George Bush and all in Congress conspiring with him. Following 9/11, the president rightfully called the attacks acts of terrorism (whoever was responsible) as they are under US law even though international law provides no generally accepted definition of this crime. They weren't acts of war, and calling them that crossed the line breaking the law as only nations can attack one another, not individuals. No evidence existed then or now Afghanistan was behind them nor did Saddam pose an imminent threat justifying our aggression.

George Bush tried and failed getting legal Security Council cover for both wars. He then tried getting it from Congress, couldn't get his preferred formal declarations and had to settle for joint-War Powers resolution authorizations to protect the country against international terrorism he chose to do by waging illegal wars against two countries.

The result today is a nation embroiled in two unwinnable wars some high officials and observers feel are the greatest strategic blunders in the nation's history. Combined they may also end up our greatest crime surpassing in lives lost the mass carnage we inflicted on Southeast Asians. That's the legacy of George Bush about to get a renewed lease on life to continue his reign of terror on the greater Middle East for another two years in spite of mass public opposition to it worldwide.

The people have spoken, but imperialism marches on aiming next at target Iran with nuclear weapons cleared for use if an attack is launched. If they are in any future conflict, every member of Congress will be criminally liable to indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague according to University of Chicago professor Jorge Hirsch even if they're authorized without congressional approval. Hirsch states why:

- the act will be one of “most serious crimes of international concern.”
- Congress funded the weapons' creation paying the military to use them.
- Congress knew having these weapons means they may be criminally used.
- Congress can act preventively now to prevent these weapons being used. Failure to do so is a crime.
- If they are, at least some in Congress “actively aided, abetted and assisted in the commission of the crimes.”

Hirsch explained further that Congress has “constitutional power to legislate” conditions, limits and restrictions over if, how and when the president can authorize military use of nuclear weapons as commander in chief. Even more damning, he points out, is the Bush Doctrine policy illegally proclaiming the right in various national security documents to wage preemptive wars using all weapons in our arsenal including nuclear ones against any country or force the administration feels threatens the national security even if it isn't true.

If Iran or any other country is so-designated and attacked with nuclear weapons, Hirsch points out every Western European signatory country to the ICC will be obliged to arrest any congressional member on their soil surrendering them to Court authority in the Hague to

stand trial since none of these nations has bilateral "Article 98 agreements" with the US granting immunity to US citizens.

This needn't happen if Congress acts responsibly and legislatively prevents George Bush from waging war with Iran, nuclear or otherwise. Warning the president against acting without congressional approval won't stop him any more than wishing will. George Bush does what he wants, and statements from leading Democrat presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and Speaker Pelosi that he must get congressional authority first are plain wrong, misguided, stupid, and now irrelevant as Democrat leaders changed their mind and will say nothing. Only an act of Congress has a chance, and unless the 110th body passes one in clear strong language it's practically telling the president do as you please and ignore what we say which he may do anyway with a stroke of a "signing statement" erasing whatever Congress legislates.

If that happens and the US attacks Iran, all bets are off on what's next with impossible to predict consequences that won't be good for the West and especially Washington. It will expand the Iraq conflict to a regional one, inflame the entire Muslim world and unleash an unpredictable backlash fallout from a desperate strategy doomed to fail. Further, it would be more proof of joint administration-congressional complicity demonstrating again the criminal class in Washington is bipartisan, but who already doesn't know that.

It's also no secret corporate interests thrive on wars and fund the parties to wage them. It's thus unlikely Congress will bite the generous hands feeding it unless the price to pay starts exceeding the benefits received. Getting reelected is top concern, but fearing a shakled trip to the Hague might focus some minds as well. Members of Congress agreeing to nuclear war against Iran will henceforth be unable to travel freely in Western Europe knowing their final destination might not be what they had in mind or their quarters the kind they're used to for a stay longer than planned for a fate usually imposed on others.

With this in mind, we learned from Secretary Rice on February 27, the US agreed to participate in an international conference with Iran and Syria on Iraq with the agenda limited to Iraqi security sure to include Washington's accusations about support for anti-US resistance. It would be foolhardy imagining Washington's offer of engagement is well-intentioned as this administration has an unblemished record of speaking with forked tongue, so nothing it's up to should be taken at face value.

What is known is that first round talks were held March 10 in Baghdad at a sub-ministerial level with no announcement at their conclusion other than agreeing to the formation of several low-level regional working parties with a further thus far unscheduled conference to be held at the foreign ministerial level at a location to be decided. They won't be bilateral unless Tehran agrees to abandon its uranium-enrichment program and Iran and Syria satisfy Washington's claim they've stopped supporting anti-US resistance in Iraq and Lebanon. Attending participants in this exercise are members of the Arab League, Organization of Islamic Unity, G 8 members, and the five permanent Security Council members who all together will likely achieve nothing.

The talks represent no softening of Washington's stance that may be hardened as they proceed with US repeating unproved claims Iranian elements support anti-American forces in Iraq meaning ultimatums will follow, no compromise is possible, and tensions in the region will end up further heightened. That's where things now stand following the Baghdad session at which senior State Department official David Satterfield accused Iran of supplying

weapons to Shia militias claiming Washington has evidence to prove it without showing any. At the same time, back home US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns was pressing ahead with efforts to get the Security Council to impose harsher sanctions on Iran because it's pursuing its legal right to develop commercial nuclear power.

How this is perceived and portrayed at home has a lot to do with what's going on. The administration may use the talks to mollify critics giving Congress more leverage to pass Bush's requested \$93 billion Iraq supplemental funding request Democrats upped to \$120 billion + with unenforceable add-on provisions to be debated in both Houses. Without a touch of irony, it's business as usual in Washington with the Pentagon readying a "shock and awe" attack against a country administration officials are engaging in phony diplomacy no one on either side is fooled by.....and the beat goes on.

So much for good intentions from an administration having none and a Congress matching it misstep by misstep. It's clear from the Democrat leadership with most others in the party acquiescing, their public posturing notwithstanding. The congressional Dems and their presidential aspirants have tacitly or explicitly kept the "military option" against Iran open meaning they'll not oppose administration plans to launch an all out attack if it's ordered. That's despite Senate Majority Leader Reid's March 2 claim he would support legislation barring an attack on Iran without congressional authority he's now backed off on.

The only issue Democrats pathetically raised is whether the administration or Congress can authorize it, but now we know a matter that serious won't be part of the Democrats' final legislative proposal. Also ignored is the fundamental issue that launching an attack will be a further act of illegal aggression against a country posing no threat to us or its neighbors and therefore must not be allowed to happen. Democrat presidential aspirants feel otherwise and have so stated it as Senator Clinton did at the late January AIPAC annual convention saying: "In dealing with this (Iran) threat....no option can be taken off the table." Senator Obama agreed saying on CBS's 60 Minutes: "I think we should keep all options on the table." And former senator John Edwards showed his resolve at Israel's Herzliya Conference in January saying: "To ensure that Iran never gets nuclear weapons, we need to keep all options on the table." Sounds like they all have the same script writer, and they surely deliver their party's message that Democrats are as eager to attack Iran as are Republicans and won't stand against it if George Bush so orders.

What's Next from Congress?

Rhetoric and wishy proposals with no chance of passage are one thing, real bipartisan action with teeth another, and so far there's none from either House with key senators and congressmen voicing the usual boilerplate about not wanting to cut off funding the troops because we have to support them. Their kind of support means letting them die or get maimed and be disabled for life for imperialism on the march. Some support.

A less than credible crumb of it came from Speaker Pelosi's backhanded pronouncement she'll link new funding requests to strict standards of resting, training and equipping the troops now off the table. Earlier, she and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid wrote the president that "thousands of the new troops (sent over) will apparently not have the armor and equipment they need to perform the mission and reduce the likelihood of casualties (and that problem needs correcting)." Now the tactics have changed with the 2008 withdrawal proposal to damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead and on with war till we win it.

Some proposals with echos of Richard Nixon's "peace with honor," his being elected in 1968 as a "peace" candidate, and his hope history would call him a "peacemaker" at the same time he was determined never to be "the first president of the United States to lose a war." So his policies ended up killing almost as many US forces as his predecessor along with one to two million Southeast Asians during his watch alone who never got to see the "peace" he promised except the one he sent them to rest in. All the while Congress debated, and war continued another 6 and a half years with serious funding cuts stalled until 1972. Even then, Richard Nixon continued waging war until the January 23, 1973 treaty was signed in Paris ending it and the last US troops came out in March. War went on in the name of peace in the same spirit coming from the White House and Congress today couched in terms of supporting the troops and "spreading democracy."

George Bush says it and so do key Democrats like Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Reid as well Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman, Carl Levin and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Joe Biden. Funding war will continue showing the one way to end it won't be taken, and the best out of Congress is non-binding posturing and the latest proposal to withdraw combat forces between March 31 and September 1, 2008. The administration's response - it can barely contain its contempt and continues doing as it pleases.

Democrats spoke but who's listening and acting. Levin and Biden mentioned other congressional action, with no chance of passage, including changing the Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq of October, 2002 whereby Congress surrendered its authority to the Executive on the most important of all constitutional powers presidents never should have. It followed the even more outlandish joint House-Senate resolution passage of the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) of September, 18, 2001 authorizing "the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States."

It effectively gave George Bush carte blanche authority to attack any nation he claims threatens national security on his say alone allowing him to declare a state of permanent war that won't end in our lifetime unless Congress stops it. So far it hasn't and shows no signs it will. Whatever it does, it faces a Bush veto meaning any chance for legislative relief needs a two-thirds majority that's practically impossible on any issue opposing the president, especially as beneath the rhetoric Democrats support Bush wars as much as Bush does.

All this will be part of the interesting "debate" on the Democrats' March 8 proposal including their proposed \$120 billion and rising supplemental funding to keep the war machine oiled and running plus all the added pork. The president already wants and should easily get a nearly half trillion dollar defense budget with \$142 billion more in emergency 2008 supplemental funding for Iraq and Afghanistan and anti-terrorism efforts that don't include additional funding for Bush's planned troop "surge" to cost billions more. Combined, the funding from 2001 through 2008 raises the amount of war spending to over \$690 billion eclipsing in current dollars Vietnam's war cost making Bush's war second only in amount to what was spent on WW II.

But there's more, lots more. The total doesn't include the following:

— An estimated \$100 billion direct cost of the 9/11 attacks.

- \$66 billion to replace destroyed or unusable military equipment.
- \$125 billion in backlogged veterans' claims.
- Unknown billions for CIA torture-prisons.

— Multi-billions for homeland security (now budgeted at over \$45 billion and rising) to keep a growing restive population in line with hardball tactics like illegal spying, mass roundups and incarcerations, and construction of secret US concentration camps for tens of thousands of aliens and US citizens Bush may label "unlawful enemy combatants" meaning lock-em-up and throw away the key.

— And there's another major suppressed future expense: the hugely underestimated cost to provide care alone for chronically sick, wounded and disabled Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz and Harvard economist Linda Bilmes believe will be a minimum \$536 billion and may end up much higher. They arrived at the number from their calculation of the number of wounded soldiers to each one killed coming up with the astonishing ratio of 16 to 1 the result of improved medical care and life-saving armor. They used data from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) indicating 50,000 surviving casualties from the wars and 200,000 veterans so far treated at VA centers, 40% of whom incurred serious brain or spinal injuries, amputations of one or more limbs, blindness, deafness, severe burns, or other severe chronic injuries.

They also cited data from the brief Gulf war in which less than 150 Americans were killed noting 48.4% of its veterans sought medical care and 44% filed disability claims, 88% of which were granted. That amounts to an astonishing total of 611,729 Gulf war vets now getting disability benefits, a large percentage suffering psychiatric illnesses including post-traumatic stress disorder and depression - for a campaign lasting six weeks with no occupation.

So far, it's known over one-third of returning Iraq and Afghanistan war vets have already been diagnosed with similar conditions, and those numbers are guaranteed eventually to skyrocket. Unlike the brief Gulf war after which US forces withdrew, the total combat and support force since 2001 is hugely larger - on the order of 1.5 million or more and growing serving multiple deployments lasting a year or longer with frequent extended tours of duty in all creating a looming epic human calamity already unfolding that will explode in the out years.

Even the VA's Deputy Undersecretary for Health Frances Murphy is concerned admitting there's now a 400,000 claims backlog resulting in waiting lists of months in some cases "render(ing)....care virtually inaccessible." The VA expects claims to reach 874,000 this year and 930,000 in 2008 which helps explain why care provided at Walter Reed and other medical facilities deteriorated so badly and are now appallingly inadequate and shameful.

It all adds up to what Stiglitz and Bilmes now estimate will be a cost of \$2.5 trillion or more for George Bush's wars having raised their earlier estimate of around \$2 trillion. It's a shocking indictment of imperial recklessness and failure to achieve anything but build bottom lines of corporate war-profiteers by looting the Treasury courtesy of US taxpayers supplying the loot. Stiglitz believes the economic damage to the country is severe enough to cause a global economic depression within two years unless major changes are made in how the economy is managed going forward.

It's starts with defunding wars and addressing huge unrepayable deficits from them. It also means Congress finally confronting a president crazed with power and on a doomed imperial mission for more of it that will destroy the nation unless he's stopped. Congress finally confronted Richard Nixon ending his misadventure he never would have on his own. But before they did, debate and posturing went on, and real action only came incrementally while the war went on for 11 bloody years following the August, 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that escalated it. It continued even though it was repealed six years later in May, 1970 and replaced by the 1973 War Powers Act limiting the president's power to wage war without congressional approval. The law is still in force, requires presidents consult Congress before and after engaging in hostilities, and amounts to much ado about nothing for all the good it does stopping George Bush from doing what he wants as long as Congress only talks and won't act.

It's time Congress took its sworn oath seriously and began undoing its lack of resolve since 9/11 that changed everything. But even if it does, it remains to be seen if a president thinking the Constitution is "just a goddamned piece of paper" will take it seriously or just go around it the way he's ignored adverse Supreme Court rulings and gotten away with it. The times keep getting more interesting with dangers becoming so great we'd better hope what Congress lacks in courage it makes up for in fear before letting war in the Middle East get to the next perilous stage meaning out-of-control and too late to matter.

In the meantime, the same forces are combining today that helped end the Vietnam conflict and in time may have the same result in the Middle East – a redoubtable Iraqi resistance to occupation, mass anti-war sentiment at home reaching the halls of Congress, and a deteriorating American fighting force with growing signs of internal rebellion against war with no end and for no purpose. What administration and congressional hawks won't do and Democrats are too ineffective or timid doing, the people of Iraq, America and our fighting men and women may do for them leaving them no other choice. The lessons of history are clear. No greater force exists than the will of millions of angry determined people set on achieving what governments won't do for them. We may now be heading for that moment of truth that may be the way to end Bush's wars and anyone after him with the same intentions. Stay tuned and never lose hope.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at www.lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

Also visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com and tune in each Saturday to the Steve Lendman News and Information Hour on The Micro Effect.com at noon US central time.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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