

# No Good Choices in the Halls of Power: Democrats Vote \$100 Billion to Continue the War

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On Friday, March 23, the Democrats in the House of Representatives pushed through the “U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans’ Health, and Iraq Accountability Act” by a vote of 218-212. The bill gives the Bush administration some \$100 billion to continue the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, while calling for U.S. combat troops to leave Iraq by September 1, 2008.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi hailed this as a vote “to bring an end to the war in Iraq.” *But it is no such thing.* This bill (and a similar Democratic Party bill under consideration in the Senate) is not a step towards ending the U.S. occupation of Iraq or the larger “war on terror” it is part of. This bill doesn’t represent a condemnation of—or accountability for—the U.S.’s unprovoked war of aggression against Iraq. Rather the bill’s stated goal is to “help fight the war on terror.” And the bill certainly doesn’t call for U.S. forces to leave the Middle East/Central Asian region.

Instead of ending the war, this bill is an effort to pressure the Bush regime to adjust its strategy in Iraq and the region to better preserve U.S. imperialist hegemony and stamp out anti-U.S. resistance, Islamic fundamentalism in particular. It’s also designed to rein in and paralyze the millions who are increasingly angry and disillusioned with the war and the Bush regime, and channel these feelings into support for a different (Democratic Party) strategy and tactics in waging that war. So while talking of ending the war, the Democrats offer a plan to continue the war in Iraq, expand the war in Afghanistan, and give Bush a green light to attack Iran!

## Retrofitting U.S. Strategy—Not Ending the War

The Democrats’ bill reflects the deep concern of many ruling class strategists that the situation in Iraq is deteriorating and the Bush strategy must be changed to head off even greater disasters for the empire. The interests of the peoples of the Middle East don’t enter into their cold-blooded, imperial calculations. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor under Jimmy Carter who has been advising the Democrats, testified before the Senate earlier this year:

“If the United States continues to be bogged down in a protracted bloody involvement in Iraq, the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran and with much of the world of Islam at large...[plunging] a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.”

So the Democrats (following in the vein of the Baker-Hamilton Study Group—see “[The Baker](#)

[Report on Iraq: Desperate Straits, Deep Divisions, Dwindling Options](#) in *Revolution* #73) are proposing a number of measures to try to stabilize the situation in Iraq, limit further U.S. losses (including the enormous stresses on the U.S. military), and shore up U.S. efforts across the region—while refocusing the U.S.’s “war on terror.” (This war, as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate, is in essence a war for greater empire.) The measures proposed by the Democrats include:

- Fully funding the war: Congress has the power to end the war by cutting off funding. Instead, the Democrats chose to give Bush \$100 billion, enabling him to continue the war as he sees fit for the immediate future. This is more money than Bush originally asked for!
- Enforcing “benchmarks”: These are the same benchmarks for the Iraqi government that Bush himself spelled out in his January 10 speech. The Democrats want to more aggressively impose them by threatening funding cutoffs and troops redeployments (from combat operations to training and/or out of the country). These benchmarks have nothing to do with liberating the Iraqi people—just the opposite. They’re aimed at heading off a strategic defeat in the region by forcing the various factions in the Iraqi government to subordinate their agendas to the U.S.’s overall goal of creating a more stable regime capable of ending the anti-occupation insurgency and the ongoing civil war, holding Iraq together, and acting in concert with U.S. goals in the region. So the Bush-Democrat benchmarks include passing a bill that divides oil revenues among Iraq’s different national and religious groups, reining in sectarian militias, and taking frontline responsibility to fight anti-U.S. forces. The U.S.-backed oil bill also opens Iraq’s enormous oil reserves up to direct and open control by foreign capital for the first time in over 30 years, potentially giving global powers like the U.S. a stranglehold over this key Iraqi resource.
- Agreeing with Bush and blaming Iraqis for their suffering: Many top Democrats spout the ugly chauvinist lies of the Bush regime, portraying the U.S. invasion as a noble effort to liberate Iraq, and claiming that the Iraqis have now screwed things up with a persistent civil war. “We have lost over 3,000 people. We have lost over 25,000 wounded. The Iraqis have had Saddam Hussein taken out. They have had two elections,” Tennessee Democrat John Tanner declared on the *Lehrer Newshour* (March 22). “They have had a government now for over a year. And we see no progress on them...it’s time for them to step up.” But this turns reality upside down. It is the U.S.’s unprovoked war of aggression that has led to the death of an estimated 650,000 Iraqis, the forced displacement of another 3.2 million (over one in ten Iraqis!), and widespread destruction. Tanner’s lie also covers up the fact that the U.S. helped trigger and continues to fuel a civil war by empowering some reactionary forces, barring others and encouraging sectarian divisions.
- “Redeployment”—not withdrawal: The Democrats are not demanding that U.S. forces immediately leave Iraq—the only just solution—or that they ever leave Iraq. Both Bush and the Democrats envision that thousands of U.S. troops will be in Iraq for years to come—just not on the frontlines of combat in the same way or in the same numbers. Nancy Pelosi’s [website](#) states: “Following redeployment, U.S. troops remaining in Iraq may only be used for diplomatic protection,

counterterrorism operations, and training of Iraqi Security Forces.” These open-ended commitments, and the Democrats’ refusal to renounce permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq, mean that thousands of American troops could be stationed in Iraq for decades to come.

- Escalating in Afghanistan: Many of the “redeployed” troops could well be used in other countries in the region. According to Pelosi, “The bill significantly increases funding to defeat al Qaeda and terrorists in Afghanistan.” She also called it an effort to concentrate on Afghanistan “where the war on terrorism is.” Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said the House bill “maximizes our chances for success in Iraq and redeploys our troops so we can more effectively wage the war on terror.” Afghanistan is not a “good war,” with Iraq a “diversion” from the “real war on terror,” as the Democrats often argue. Both are parts of the Bush regime’s war for greater empire, and the strikingly similar outcomes in both countries—the deepening suffering and anger of the people, the empowering of brutal reactionaries, the strengthening of oppressive, feudal relations—illustrate this reality.
- Preserving the U.S. imperialist military: Another goal of the redeployment is preserving and rebuilding the U.S. military—the U.S.’s main weapon for enforcing its global hegemony. “The war in Iraq has produced a national security crisis,” Pelosi warned, “with military readiness at its lowest level since the Vietnam War.” In supporting the House bill, Brzezinski stated, “The United States cannot afford an open-ended commitment to a war without end. A means must be devised to end the U.S. combat role in Iraq and reduce our troop levels, so that we can begin to rebuild our military and reclaim our position of leadership in the world.”
- Giving Bush a green light to attack Iran: The Democrats removed a stipulation that Bush had to get Congressional approval before attacking Iran. With the U.S. openly threatening Iran and with war preparations at an advanced stage, and given the Bush regime’s track record of launching pre-emptive wars based on lies—this amounts to giving Bush a bright green light to attack Iran.
- Pressuring Bush, without unraveling the war: The Democrats are trying to walk the fine line of pressuring Bush while continuing to give him freedom to wage the war as “commander-in-chief,” and not provoking a political crisis which could also contribute to a U.S. defeat. That’s why the Democrats have continued funding the war and why there are no means in their bill for enforcing their demands. In terms of the benchmarks, all Bush has to do is periodically “certify” in public that the Iraqi government is meeting them. And California Democrat Lynn Woolsey said on [Democracy Now!](#) (March 22), “There are virtually no enforcement measures in this legislation that will make the President do anything that we’re telling him to do... when we get to the end of August 2008 and the war is still going on, we’re going to say to the President, ‘Alright, now you have to bring them home.’ The only way we can force him to do that in this bill is to sue him.” (Of course, whether a political crisis will be averted is another matter. Bush has threatened to veto the Democrats’ legislation and is demanding a bill with no stipulations—or “strings”—at all. Overall the possibility

for geopolitical disaster in Iraq—or as a result of war with Iran—has made tensions within the ruling establishment very, very sharp.)

All these steps flow from the Democrat Party's agreement with the Bush regime's basic goal of maintaining and strengthening U.S. imperialist global dominance—even as they have deep disagreements over how to realize it. An insightful column in the *Washington Post* noted the striking similarity between the strategic visions of Democratic “neo-liberals” and Republican “neocons”:

“[T]he fact is that prevailing Democratic doctrine is not that different from the Bush-Cheney doctrine. Many Democrats, including senators who voted to authorize the war in Iraq, embraced the idea of muscular foreign policy based on American global supremacy and the presumed right to intervene to promote democracy or to defend key U.S. interests long before 9/11, and they have not changed course since. Even those who have shifted against the war have avoided doctrinal questions....without a coherent alternative to the Bush doctrine, with its confidence in America's military preeminence and the global appeal of ‘free market democracy,’ the Democrats' midterm victory may not be repeated in November 2008. Or, if the Democrats do win in 2008, they could remain staked to a vision of a Pax Americana strikingly reminiscent of Bush's.” (“[It's Uphill for the Democrats](#),” Tony Smith, *Washington Post*, March 11, 2007)

### What is Needed to End the War

In November, millions voted for the Democrats to protest Bush and the war, and in hopes they would end it. Today, many—including people who worked energetically to elect Democrats and who've been lobbying them to cut off war funding—feel bitter, betrayed, and outraged.

They should be outraged.

The lesson is not that the Democrats “sold out” or are “spineless.” The lesson is that the Democrats are a ruling class party (and this is deeply institutionalized, regardless of the desires or intentions of its supporters or even some elected Democrats), acting to advance the interests of a capitalist-imperialist system they're part of and represent. These interests are directly antagonistic to the interests and sentiments of billions of people globally and the vast majority in the U.S.

The content of the “Iraq Accountability Act” and the way it was pushed through (including by threatening and strong-arming Democrats who said they wanted to vote against war funding and refusing to allow a vote on an amendment to only fund a withdrawal of U.S. forces) show this. Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans make decisions on the basis of elections or public opinion. They make decisions based on the needs and interests of the imperialist system.

How can anything good for the people possibly come from decisions based not on ending an unjust war, but “winning” it? Not on ending a neo-colonial occupation, but stabilizing and continuing it? Not on supporting real liberation and self-determination, but on controlling countries and resources half way around the globe, and ensuring that the corporate-financial rulers of a country with some three percent of the world's population can dominate and determine the destinies of the other 97%?

For a deep analysis of the U.S. political structure, the struggle between different factions at the top of this pyramid, and their relationship to the people, readers should dig into Bob Avakian's "[The Pyramid of Power and the Struggle to Turn This Whole Thing Upside Down](#)" (*Revolutionary Worker* #1237, April 25, 2004)

And the problem isn't only that the Democrats are betraying people's hopes. They're also actively and aggressively trying to channel and confine people's hopes into pro-war, pro-imperialist politics. These are the only choices offered (in elections generally, especially important ones), and the only choices deemed "realistic" by the powers-that-be. Take a "poll" conducted by Moveon.org, an activist group closely tied to the Democratic Party, right before the war funding vote. Moveon gave its members the "choice" of voting for Pelosi's bill—or not. Voting to end funding for the war wasn't a choice, even though the head of Moveon admitted its membership would have supported it (See "[Moveon moves in with Pelosi](#)").

This is one way millions of anti-war people end up voting for one pro-war candidate vs another. And this is already being "programmed" into the 2008 elections—and into the minds of anyone who remains confined by these choices. This will happen unless and until the entire political calculus is upended by massive upheaval from below.

But such an outpouring cannot and will not happen as long as millions are putting their hopes in the Democrats—either passively by waiting for 2008, or even actively, by focusing their energy, efforts, hopes, and yes money into pressuring the Democrats to "do the right thing" instead of putting them where they can really count for something: into mobilizing the one force that can stop the war and drive out the Bush regime— the millions, from all walks of life, who oppose them. Inspiring and organizing these millions to take independent mass political action based on the just demands of ending the war and turning back all the outrages of the Bush regime from torture to spying to theocracy, is the only realistic option and the only way these crimes will be stopped. It will never happen by hoping the Democrats become something they're not, and never have been.

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