

Opposing the Iraq Supplemental and Iran Threats

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The Congressional resolution passed last week gives Bush another \$100 billion to continue the U.S. occupation of Iraq. That much is now guaranteed. The timelines and restrictions included in the bill -- clearly responding to the strong public support for ending the war -- were weakened almost to the disappearing point to allow the razor-thin vote. Very few of those toothless restrictions will likely make it into the final bill that must survive a super-majority in the Senate, a House-Senate conference committee, and a likely Bush veto.

But the effort to hold Congressmembers to their electoral mandate must be continued and ratcheted up, not abandoned, even as we look towards pressing alternative centers of power (city councils, state legislatures, mayors and governors, newspaper editorial boards, influential clergy, etc.) as instruments to pressure Congress from new directions.

Congress is not the peace movement. So the peace movement must stay unified on our principles and our demands, in the face of congressional waffling and "realistic" pragmatism, unfortunately promoted by one influential part of our movement. Whatever they do, we must stay consistent on demanding an end to the U.S. occupation: de-funding (not re-funding) the war, and bringing home (not redeploying) all (not just some) of the troops (including the mercenaries). The longstanding AFSC slogan has it right: "Not one more death, not one more dollar." That means STOP funding the war. STOP allowing Bush to send more U.S. troops to kill more Iraqis and be killed in the process. Just stop.

These talking points are in two parts: first, an

assessment of why the real peace movement must continue to stand on principle and oppose the supplemental gift of \$100 billion to Bush to continue the occupations. Second, an assessment of some of the rising dangers of a U.S. attack on Iran, and its potential consequences.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING BILL

The Democratic leadership in the House claims the \$125 billion supplemental is the way to end the war. Something passed in the Senate may include some of the same claims. Aside from setting a date for bringing home troops, the House version included a number of items many in the peace movement would ordinarily support - veterans' health benefits, Katrina survivors' assistance, children's health insurance ...

So if there's a timeline, what's the problem with the supplemental? Why shouldn't peace activists support it?

Because it gives President Bush another \$100 billion to continue the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And it doesn't end the occupation or prevent expansion of the war to Iran.

WHAT IT DOES:

It calls for pulling out some troops from Iraq by August 2008.

BUT:

It exempts whole categories of troops from the withdrawal ...

Troops "training the Iraqi military" can stay -- currently 6,000, perhaps as many as 20,000 (no limit in the supplemental).

Troops engaged in "special operations" can stay -- the Marines say they want 20,000 for Anbar Province alone, perhaps as many as 40,000 for the whole country (no limit in the supplemental).

Troops "protecting diplomatic enclaves" like the huge Green Zone and the US Embassy, the largest in the world, and maybe including the

numerous US bases established in Iraq, can stay -- 20,000 is a conservative number (no limit in the supplemental).

That means Bush could keep unlimited numbers, perhaps 60,000-80,000 troops, permanently in Iraq -- and still be in compliance with the bill.

And the bill does not require that the troops withdrawn from Iraq be sent home; they can be immediately deployed to Afghanistan, or to bases in surrounding Arab countries, or to ships in the Persian Gulf -- or be used to attack Iran.

WHAT IT DOES:

It imposes restrictions on Pentagon deployments, prohibiting the deployment of troops not fully trained, not adequately equipped, and not adequately rested between deployments.

BUT:

It includes a waiver for President Bush to simply state his intention to override those restrictions, allowing him to send in as many untrained, badly equipped and exhausted troops as he wishes.

WHAT IT DOES:

Prohibit construction of new permanent bases in Iraq.

BUT:

It does nothing to close the existing permanent bases the U.S. has built across Iraq and includes billions for "military construction" presumably for those existing bases.

WHAT IT DOES:

Require Iraq's government to pass a new oil law.

BUT:

The law being debated in the parliament abandons Iraq's long history of maintaining control of its oil resources in favor of allowing international (especially U.S.) oil companies to take control of large sectors of the vital oil industry.

WHAT IT DOES:

Cut 10% of the funding for private military contractors.

BUT:

It allows 90% of the 100,000 or so mercenaries who fight alongside the U.S. military to remain in Iraq.

WHAT IT DOESN'T DO:

The supplemental does not prohibit an unprovoked attack on Iran.

The supplemental does not end the occupation of Iraq.

ON THE RISING THREATS AGAINST IRAN

The U.S. is continuing to ratchet up threats against Iran. The current stand-off in the Gulf between Iran and Britain may well not have been a deliberate British provocation, beyond the "normal" provocative nature of the U.S.-British strategy of boarding and "inspecting" ships, etc., but that doesn't mean it isn't dangerous. Blair isn't so keen on an attack on Iran, his rhetoric even after the sailors were captured has been remarkably low-key, and a move against Iran could threaten his already-shaky political standing. The Shatt al-Arab waterway is always a difficult navigation point, even aside from political tensions, and this kind of move has happened before and blown over in a few days. However, it's likely the Cheney gang is pushing Britain to escalate, to make this Tonkin Gulf II (the false claim of a North Vietnamese attack used to justify the Viet Nam war in 1964), though it doesn't appear Blair/Brown are biting yet. But, once again, having said all THAT, things are very tense could easily spin out of control. So we need to keep up the pressure.

The UN Security Council resolution passed last week was the result of heavy U.S. pressure, but also an example of the limitations of U.S.

diplomacy when imposed by a shoot-first-negotiate-later U.S. regime. The pressure was enough to force opportunistically vacillating Russia and China to toe the line, as well as to push the Council's Non-Aligned members -- Indonesia, Qatar and even South Africa -- to give in as well. But the final text was far weaker than the harsh sanctions the U.S. wanted, and getting the others on board required significant concessions in Washington's position.

The resolution does not impose broad economic sanctions similar to those imposed on Iraq, with the inevitably devastating consequences. The most dangerous immediate aspect of the new sanctions resolution is that it broadens the range of Iranian institutions and individuals subject to the "targeted sanctions," including not only those alleged to be involved in Iran's nuclear enrichment programs, but as well leaders of the Revolutionary Guard and other military officials whom the U.S. claims are somehow connected to Iran's support for Hezbollah, Hamas and Iraqi militias. The resolution forbids Iran to export weapons, and freezes the assets of several dozen individuals and institutions, of whom about 1/3 are involved with the nuclear program, and 2/3 with the Revolutionary Guards and others. But U.S. efforts to impose travel bans, a full embargo prohibiting all countries from buying Iranian weapons, and a denial of bank loans, grants and credits from all international banks and financial institutions, failed -- all those punishments are merely "encouraged," not enforced.

South Africa failed in its effort to discard the imposition of military and financial sanctions. But the non-aligned effort to demand a call for a nuclear weapons-free zone across the Middle East had achieved partial success. The U.S. and the other permanent members of the Council (who not only hold Council vetoes but are also the five "legal" nuclear weapons states under the Non-Proliferation Treaty) agreed to include the

nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ) language, but undermined its significance. It is included only as part of the preamble, rather than an enforceable operative paragraph, and even more fatally, it refers only to an earlier call for a NWFZ made by the UN's nuclear watchdog agency (IAEA), rather than calling for such a move itself. That is significant because Israel, the only nuclear weapons power in the Middle East, is not a signatory to the treaty creating the IAEA and therefore not subject to its mandates. A Council resolution calling directly for creation of such a nuclear-free zone (such as the one the U.S. drafted as part of the resolution ending the 1991 Gulf War) is binding on all countries, including Israel. A call from global civil society demanding a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East as the basis for resolving the current tensions could be based on a call to enforce that early Council resolution.

Aside from the political posturing, the greatest actual danger from the new resolution may be that it is already strengthening U.S. efforts to enforce compliance with Washington's unilateral economic sanctions against Iran on other countries around the world. The model may be the U.S. embargo against Cuba -- ostensibly imposed only by the U.S. itself, but designed to force other countries to abide by it as well. In the case of Cuba, this means a U.S. law that prohibits any ship docking at a Cuban port from coming to any U.S. port for six months. Faced with that choice, how likely is it that profit-driven shipping companies will bother calling at Cuban ports at all? Similarly, U.S. Treasury Department officials are already pressing banks all around the world to refuse to deal with Iran, on threat of losing U.S. business access.

Phyllis Bennis' new book is *Challenging Empire: How People, Governments, and the UN Defy U.S. Power*, just published by Interlink. It is available from IPS or from www.interlinkbooks.com

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