

Socialists: Iraq War Still Number One Issue

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U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates recently announced that he is supporting a pause in U.S. troop reduction in Iraq; it is a decision that is strongly opposed by socialists throughout the nation and a vast majority of the U.S. population. It is now certain that President Bush and Congress will maintain a large military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan throughout 2008 and into 2009.

Many Washington Democrats seemed surprised by the announcement and have criticized the decision of the Bush administration and Secretary Gates. Considering their criticism, the Democrats have continued their strong support for increased war funding during the past five years of the Iraq occupation; and working with Republicans, the Democrats have given Bush more than \$500 billion dollars to continue his war.

A growing consensus of the U.S. population is opposed to the continuous occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, more than 80 percent of all American according to recent scientific polls; and the war is the shame of U.S. foreign policy. As the U.S. prepares to enter into year 6 of the occupation, the losses are staggering. American military casualties in Iraq are 3,960 and 483 casualties in Afghanistan. Iraqi deaths now exceed one million, and more than four million Iraqis remain displaced. It is estimated that it will cost more than \$2 trillion to rebuild Iraq, and these recent estimates may be low as the cost continues to rise daily.

Senator Barack Obama and Senator Hillary Clinton have publicly criticized the decision of the Bush administration to halt troop withdrawals; while on the other hand, both senators have pledged to maintain a dominant U.S. military presence in the Middle East to "protect American interest." Senator John McCain has remained a stalwart supporter for the Bush war and strongly supports a strong U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. McCain has consistently supported increased troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While it may be said that Senator Obama originally opposed the Iraq invasion, he is now the strongest advocate for U.S. imperialism. The senator has vowed to increase the U.S. military budget that is now over \$700 billion annually and is pledging to add more that 90,000 soldiers to the ranks of the U.S. Army and Marines. The senator has also pledged to keep American forces in the Middle East and has said that the U.S. will maintain a strong military presence in the region into the next decade; this is only aimed at asserting U.S. hegemony over the oil-rich region of the Middle East and Central Asia.

Recently, the Bush administration sent a \$3.1 trillion dollar budget to Congress; however, a majority of Americans are not aware that the high cost of the Iraq War, the cost to maintain U.S. military bases and operations around the world, and the overall cost to maintain the U.S. military and related U.S. military expenses will cost the nation more than \$1 trillion.

Due to this waste of U.S. tax dollars, vital services are being sacrificed; including the health care for nearly 50 million of Americans, it has resulted in a higher price tag for a college education, millions of Americans will lose their homes, U.S. veterans are not receiving proper care and many are now homeless and jobless, and the value of the U.S. dollar is rapidly declining around the world. The war has also caused escalating inflation and has plunged the nation into the beginning stages of an economic recession.

The Peace and Freedom Party and Socialist Party USA, both socialist parties, have strongly opposed U.S. involvement in Iraq, even prior to the invasion in March 2003. Both parties have maintained that the Iraq War was launched only to advance U.S. imperialism and to control the vast oil reserves in the Middle East. Both socialist parties are calling for an immediate end to the military occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the withdrawal and return of all U.S. troops, and the immediate release of all prisoners of war and detained civilians.

In the 2008-2009 Platform of Socialist Party USA, it states "The United States is the sole remaining global superpower. The U.S. government uses its overwhelming military power to consolidate its strategic hold over the entire world and to defend and advance the interests of U.S. owned corporations as they exploit the working people and natural resources of the entire planet. We stand in total opposition to U.S. imperialism and the current "war on terror" which is just another subterfuge for U.S. imperialism."

To better understand the growing threat to working class people, democracy, and the threat to our civil liberties, please read the Platforms of the Peace and Freedom Party and the Socialist Party USA. I would also suggest reading an article that was recently published on the World Socialist Web Site by Bill Van Auken, February 14, 2008, "The Two Faces of Barack Obama."