

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate

Senate cover-up of WMD lies underscores Democrats' support for Iraq war

By Bill Van Auken
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The following statement was issued by the presidential candidate of the SEP in response to the Senate Intelligence Committee's release Friday of its bipartisan report on "pre-war intelligence estimates" on Iraq.

While the war in Iraq remains the most burning political question facing the American people, the Democratic Party is colluding with the Republicans to silence any debate over the war in the run-up to the November election.

This is the unmistakable significance of the unanimous report released Friday by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The document was fashioned to present the Bush administration's campaign of lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as an "intelligence failure" originating not in the White House, but rather in the Central Intelligence Agency. The report cleared the administration—and Vice President Dick Cheney by name—of any attempt to "coerce, influence or pressure analysts to change their judgments related to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction."

This version of events is preposterous. It flies in the face of a record that is well known throughout Washington. The "faulty intelligence" about an imminent threat from Iraqi chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons was the "intelligence" the Bush White House aggressively demanded, even as it dismissed dissenting voices from within the intelligence services questioning the validity of such dire claims.

One past administration official after another—from former treasury secretary Paul O'Neil to ex-counterterrorism coordinator Richard Clarke—has testified that the Bush administration came into office seeking a war with Iraq and determined to manufacture a pretext. The Bush war cabal seized upon the September 11, 2001, attacks, inventing a Baghdad-Al Qaeda tie that one investigation after another has debunked, and raising the specter of attacks on America employing phantom Iraqi WMD.

In the months after the US invasion, as it became obvious that there were no such weapons in Iraq, CIA analysts and others familiar with the inner workings of the administration, came forward to the media telling the same story. They testified that the administration—and in particular Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others in the Pentagon's civilian leadership—had "browbeaten" and "bullied" them to alter intelligence reports in order to make the case for war.

The Pentagon even set up its own in-house intelligence bureau to produce the desired findings, as those pushing for war became impatient with the CIA. They utilized the now-disgraced Ahmed Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress to invent evidence that many

in US intelligence circles knew to be false.

CIA Director George Tenet, whose resignation takes effect Sunday, buckled under the pressure from the White House and the Pentagon. The result was a September 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq that reversed earlier conclusions that Iraqi weapons programs had been effectively shut down. The administration seized upon this hastily prepared document, published a declassified version stripped of dissenting estimates of Iraqi WMD, and incorporated it into the torrent of lies used to prepare the war.

On first glance, the bipartisan unity on this crude cover-up might appear inexplicable. Why would the Democrats on the Senate committee—the party's vice-presidential candidate, John Edwards, among them—agree to whitewash the Bush administration? Why, in the middle of an election year, would they relinquish such a potent political weapon? Clearly, the most serious charge against this administration is that it led the country into an illegal war on false pretenses—an act meriting not only impeachment, but a war crimes trial.

The political maneuvers leading up to the report are typical of the venality and cowardice that characterize all of the actions of the Democrats on Capitol Hill. Initially, they had proposed an investigation that would cover not merely the CIA's intelligence performance, but also the role of the Bush administration in manipulating intelligence to stampede the country into war. The Republican leadership countered that this was not part of the committee's remit, and that the probe should focus solely on the CIA.

In the end, a decision was reached to put off any treatment of the administration's role to a second phase of the probe, whose findings would not be released until after the November election. There is considerable doubt whether this second installment will ever materialize.

In this case, the Senate Democrats' spineless acquiescence had a very definite political motivation. In presenting the report Friday, the ranking Democrat on the intelligence committee, Senator John Rockefeller of West Virginia, claimed that the Senate would not have voted three-to-one to authorize the Iraq war if it had only known that the intelligence was "flawed."

Like the claim that the CIA fooled Bush, this assertion turns reality inside out. In the late summer of 2002, the Democrats in Washington were among the most vociferous in demanding that the CIA speedily produce an intelligence estimate on Iraq. It arrived on Capitol Hill just 10 days before the vote to grant Bush unrestricted power to invade Iraq. The Democratic leadership in the House and Senate pressed the

CIA to provide a report that it knew would contain sweeping allegations of Iraqi stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, and an active nuclear program, in order to provide it with political cover to give Bush authorization to launch an unprovoked war.

Now, with the lies used to justify the invasion thoroughly exposed, and with tens thousands of Iraqis and nearly 900 American troops dead, the Democrats continue to support the war, and—if the words of their presidential candidate John Kerry are to be believed—they are prepared to escalate the US intervention.

In his latest written statement on the question, published last week under the title “US Policy in Iraq Needs Heavy Dose of Realism,” Kerry declared that the then-army chief of staff Gen. Eric Shinseki “was right when he argued that more troops would be needed.”

Kerry went on to state: “The point here is not to revisit history, but to forge a new policy based on what we know and what will be most effective. We still have an opportunity to prevent Iraq from becoming a failed state...”

Why not “revisit history”? Why not review the deliberate deception of the American people, the violations of international law, and the obscene war profiteering that have characterized the aggression against Iraq from its beginning? The answer is obvious: Kerry does not want to further de-legitimize a war that he intends to continue.

The Democrats have neither the justification nor the inclination to brand the ongoing carnage in Iraq as “Bush’s war.” It is their war too.

The way in which this war was prepared and executed is an indictment not just of one administration or one party, but of the entire American ruling elite—from the Democrats, to the pliant media, to the corporations eager to profit from the seizure of Iraq and its oil wealth. It represents a monstrous violation of both international law and the democratic rights of the American people.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq are the realization of a consensus policy within US ruling circles to use Washington’s military might to secure domination of the world’s markets and control of vital resources, most importantly, oil.

If powerful sections of the financial oligarchy have now turned against Bush, it is, in the main, because they think he has botched the project. Kerry is increasingly seen as a more competent “CEO,” who just might avert a total disaster by means of some tactical adjustments.

The gulf could not be wider between the calculations being made by these ruling layers and the sentiments of broad masses of American people, many of whom mistakenly see a vote for Kerry as a blow against war. The clash between the reality of Kerry’s policies and the illusions that have been fostered regarding his campaign was on display Thursday night at Radio City Music Hall in New York, where artists and entertainers appeared to raise money for the Democratic candidate.

It was scene of political self-delusion. One after another actor and musician took the stage to passionately denounce the Iraq war. Meryl Streep spoke of bombs “dropped on sleeping families in Baghdad”; Jessica Lange condemned a “self-serving regime of deceit, hypocrisy and belligerence”; John Mellencamp sang lyrics describing Bush as a “cheap thug that sacrifices our young.” Kerry and Edwards responded with banalities about defending “real American values.”

Millions of American working people, professionals, students and youth are revolted by the war in Iraq and want to see it ended. But the precondition for realizing this goal is shaking off illusions that it can be achieved on the basis of a policy summed up in the phrase “anybody but Bush.” The struggle for an end to war and the defense of social and democratic rights in no way corresponds to the political

agenda of Kerry and the Democrats. One need only listen to what they are saying or read the Democrats’ platform.

This platform does not indict the administration for launching the war. Instead, it uses a cowardly phrase that exonerates the war criminals in the Bush administration—and their Democratic accomplices: “People of good will disagree about whether America should have gone to war in Iraq.”

On the most burning political issue of the day—an imperialist war based on lies, which has already cost thousands of Iraqi and American lives, and tens of billions of dollars—all the Democrats can muster is a hypocritical evasion. There is little, if any, precedent for such a demonstration of political and moral bankruptcy by a “major” party.

The platform does not call for a withdrawal of US troops, even as polls show that nearly half of the American people and a substantial majority of Democrats favor the immediate evacuation of US forces. Instead, it indicates that even more troops should be sent to kill and die in Iraq.

Those tens of millions of Americans who oppose the war have been politically disenfranchised by the determination of both parties to prevent this election from being turned into a referendum on Iraq. The Democrats, in particular, are pursuing this antidemocratic goal with bureaucratic machinations aimed at keeping candidates of the Socialist Equality Party—as well as other independent and third party candidates—off the ballot.

With every day that the election draws closer, the non-debate between the Democrats and Republicans points to one conclusion: stopping the war requires a break with the two-party system. The American working people, the great majority of the population, cannot achieve their needs and aims outside of building of a new mass independent political movement based upon a socialist program.

We in the SEP are participating in this election in order to politically prepare such a movement and rally the many thousands who are prepared to fight for it.

Jim Lawrence, my vice-presidential running mate, and I, together with congressional and state legislative candidates in different parts of the country, will directly oppose the bipartisan straitjacket on political debate. We will strive to make the fight to end the war the central issue in this election.

We will use our campaign to tirelessly demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq and the prosecution of those who conspired to launch this illegal war. We will also demand the payment of compensation to the Iraqi people, to the families of the hundreds of young men and women sacrificed in this war, and to the many more soldiers who have been severely wounded.

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