

## Opinion

## Iraq War Into Next Administration

&gt; By Bill Van Auken, WSWS

In a bid by the two major parties to prevent November's presidential election from being turned into a referendum on the war in Iraq, the Bush administration and the Democratic leadership in Congress are both working to craft new war funding legislation that would pay for the fighting to continue at the present level well past January, when the next president takes office.

According to media reports, the congressional Democrats are still debating how—not if—they will approve the money needed to continue the ongoing wars against the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last Friday, President Bush formally submitted a detailed request for a \$70 billion "bridge" appropriation that would fund the wars from the beginning of the next fiscal year in October 2008 through the spring of 2009. This comes on top of the \$108 billion that the administration has requested for the current fiscal year.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service, the new spending bills would bring the total amount approved by Congress to pay for the two wars since their inception to \$875 billion.

While the congressional leadership had projected that legislation could be introduced as early as this week and wrapped up before the Memorial Day recess, key Democrats have indicated that the process may not prove that speedy.

Representative Steny Hoyer, the Democratic House majority leader, said he thought it was unlikely that a vote on the measure would come this week as initially anticipated.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Democrat of Nevada) said that there was no certainty that Congress would meet the Memorial Day deadline and insisted that it did not really matter. "We will do best to finish this by the Memorial Day break," Reid said. "But if we don't, it's no big deal, there is money there." The Pentagon, he noted, has adequate funding to pay for the war into June.

Apparently at issue is a disagreement between House and Senate Democratic leaders about how far they should take the political charade that is organized each time the war spending measures come up. The aim of this exercise is to allow Democratic legislators to posture as war opponents, while assuring that the necessary votes are forthcoming to pass the legislation paying for the wars.

According to the Associated Press, House Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi and House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey "are pushing to avoid a veto" by Bush, while the Senate leadership is more willing to drag the process out.

## &gt; Pelosi's Point

"We would rather just save time and get it over with right from the start," Pelosi told Capitol Hill reporters last Thursday.

Pelosi reportedly is proposing to organize a separate vote on a troop withdrawal amendment—rather than writing it into the funding legislation itself—and is attempting to short circuit any consideration and debate within the relevant congressional committees.

In a May 3 article on the dilemma facing the congressional Democratic leaders, the Wall Street Journal cited their fear that they "could seem insensitive to the military if they push too hard to add their spending priorities to the measure." At the same time, the Journal noted that "they also could frustrate their vocal antiwar base if they cave in too readily to White House demands."

Such is the political tightrope upon which Pelosi, Reid and their Senate and House colleagues are performing. They are committed to passing the war spending measure, out of fear that they could be tarred as weak on national security and accused of failing to "support our troops." At the same time, they want to carry out this support for the war in a way that does not appear to "cave in too readily" to the White House, so as to preserve the illusions of those who still look to the Democrats as some kind of antiwar alternative to the policies of the Bush administration.

Pelosi has promised to introduce language that would tie domestic spending initiatives, such as a 13-week extension of unemployment benefits and a new college benefits package for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, to the war spending bill.

These add-ons are being proposed with the knowledge that the White House will threaten a veto unless they are removed. The intention, congressional Democrats have indicated, is to thereby "expose" the Republicans as placing a greater priority on continuing the war than on solving social needs at home.

In the end, however, the Democrats will act to approve legislation based on these same priorities. "The leadership has decided to avoid a confrontation," a senior Senate aide told the Wall Street Journal. "It's a strategic decision to avoid picking a fight where he [Bush] wants to pick a fight."

The strategy of the Democratic leadership has the effect of diverting the debate over the Iraq war away from any consideration of the criminal character of the war itself into one over budgetary priorities and processes, in which the Bush administration will inevitably take the offensive, accusing the Democrats of larding up a military spending bill with non-military appropriations.

## Erdogan Denies Planning New Party

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's office has called local media reports about his ruling Justice and Development (AK) party's planned response to a bid to close it down "untrue".

A leading broadcaster and national newspaper had claimed that Erdogan would form a new party if the constitutional court shuts his existing one down, Aljazeera reported.

The case could see 71 members of the AK party, including Erdogan, banned from politics for five years.



Kanal D, a Turkish broadcaster, reported on Monday that Erdogan also said that if he was personally banned, he would call elections and run as an independent candidate.

The broadcaster said he disclosed the information to a group of journalists at a dinner on Saturday evening.

The statement from Erdogan's office read "the stories do not reflect the exact truth in terms of the contents of the conversation, the nature of the invitation and the list of invitees."

The prime minister was quoted in Vatan newspaper as saying the Turkish economy could not cope with an extended court process, so the case would be completed in July.

It also quoted him as saying he did not expect the court to actually shut the party down and that he would not seek constitutional changes to avert the closure.

Last week, the AK party submitted its preliminary defense in the case.

## News Diary

THURSDAY, MAY 8

■ **MOSCOW** - Russian parliament expected to vote on whether to confirm Vladimir Putin as prime minister.



■ **OCCUPIED PALESTINE** - 60th anniversary of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian lands. US President George W. Bush is due in Israel.



■ **BELFAST** - First anniversary of Northern Ireland's power-sharing government.



## Blockade Will Not Weaken Hamas



➤ Hamas security forces patrol the streets of Gaza, May 5.

The international community's policy to weaken Hamas has failed and should be reevaluated, two leading EU diplomats have said.

The blockade imposed on Gaza is not fulfilling its objectives of weakening Hamas and is just causing great suffering to the civilian population of the strip, European Union Ambassador to Israel Ramiro Cibrián-Uzal said Monday.

"We need to think about alternative policies, because this has not been successful. This is important to recognize," he added, PressTV reported.

Meanwhile, European Commission representative John Kjaer also stated that the closure of the crossings into Gaza had been counterproductive.

Both envoys maintained that there would be no EU contacts with Hamas until the organization accepted the Quartet's three conditions for engagement: recognizing Israel's right to exist, renouncing terrorism, and accepting previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements.

Since the Islamic movement Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip nearly a year ago, the Zionist regime has held a tight grip on the Gazans, allowing a slim aid inflow into the impoverished region.

The severe shortage of necessities in Gaza from food and water to fuel and medication has sounded alarms over a humanitarian crisis unfolding in the densely-populated strip.

## &gt; 7 Palestinians Wounded

Seven Palestinians have reportedly been wounded in a clash between PA security forces and Palestinian activists in the occupied West Bank.

The clash erupted in Qabatiya, south of the city of Jenin, when the security forces fired at the activists 'massively and indiscriminately', Israeli Ynetnews quoted the residents as saying on Tuesday.

Ahmad Kamil, one of the injured civilians, who sustained critical wounds, is reportedly in a state of brain death.

Two Islamic Jihad activists were also wounded in the attack, the sources said.

## &gt; UN Receives Fuel

The UN relief operation in Gaza said it has received enough fuel from Israel to continue working for the next 20 days, AP reported.

UN spokesman Chris Gunness said Monday it was disgrace that his organization would be deprived of fuel.

On Sunday he said tanks were empty. Gaza residents rely on Israel for all their fuel. The army said it had to stop transferring fuel on Sunday.

About 860,000 of Gaza's 1.5 million people receive aid from the UN. The economic situation has worsened since Israel closed crossings and cut off most supplies in June.

Egypt has been trying to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, but the efforts have not yielded results so far.

## &gt; Unfulfilled Promise

In other news, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in a meeting Monday that he understands the Palestinians need to see their lives improve if peacemaking is to succeed and pledged to take tangible steps, officials said, AP reported.

The meetings between Olmert and Abbas have produced few obvious results since peace talks were resumed last year.

The negotiations are meant to solve the most contentious issues in the decades-old conflict, including borders, Palestinian refugees and the dispute over Beit-ul-Muqaddas.

Abbas aides said the Palestinian president is giving the negotiations two or three months to produce progress and will consider resigning if he believes the talks have failed.

They spoke on condition of anonymity because Abbas has not yet made a final decision.

Palestinians want all of the West Bank—which Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War—as part of their state, but are ready to give up nearly 2 percent of the territory in exchange for an equal amount of land from what is now known as the illegitimate regime of Israel.