

In the Aftermath of the US Elections: First Thoughts

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It's clear that the November 2006 election was a national referendum on the Iraq war and the Bush regime. Although Green Party candidates ran as antiwar candidates there was no "major" antiwar party. Nonetheless, voters made it clear that they repudiate the war and Bush's leadership, which also means revulsion over the corruption and sex scandals that came from those who claimed to be so moral.

This should create an opening for the antiwar movement to organize and speak as the voice of a popular majority. In addition to pushing the argument for immediate withdrawal, the antiwar movement needs to put the issues of permanent detention and torture on the movement's agenda.

Will the Bush/neoncon gang proceed on track toward war with Iran? It looks like the neocons have been isolated on this war drive. Even though Bush had "made up his mind" to take on Iran, his mind will be unmade. Given that "victory" in Iraq is clearly impossible, the only way out of this debacle is by way of some kind of "grand bargain" with Iran and Syria. This requires backing off the war drive and involving Europe as well as Russia and China in a deal that implicitly accepts the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons capability sometime down the road. In this scenario, the U.S. would continue its espionage and low-level destabilization efforts in Iran, but give up the neocons' "liberation through regime change" fantasy.

The spectacle of people like Richard Perle, David Frum and Kenneth Adelman distancing themselves from Bush signals that they know their project is pretty much dead. Even Bush realized he had to sacrifice Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense, replacing him with Robert Gates, a junior associate on his dad's foreign policy team.

Bush had already dropped his "stay the course" line. Even the administration realized the growing chaos in Iraq means that it's impossible to hang on at current troop levels and hope for the best. The new policy will require bipartisan support. Thus Bush new hope is the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, headed by James Baker (Bush the First's Secretary of State) and. Their task is to put together an exit strategy. Chances are that the proposals they will submit in December will call for intensive regional diplomacy and plans for "redeploying" some troops.

The Democrats are certainly willing to hoist up the bipartisan flag. Even if they won the majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, they have little strategy beyond holding the Administration accountable for war profiteering and gross mismanagement. They have no notion of how to bring "stability" to Iraq, and they certainly don't want to be blamed for high-tailing it out of the country.

The Democrats will agree not to rock the administration's boat regarding the new/old quagmire in Afghanistan. From a betting perspective, it looks like the "over-under" on the length of the NATO commitment in Afghanistan is about ten years. And that's another reason why it makes no rational sense to push an unwinnable confrontation with Iran. Recent events in Pakistan - the madrassa bombing (whether by the Pakistani or U.S. air force) and suicide-bomb killing of dozens of soldier

recruits in training - point to the real possibility of that country unraveling in chaos.

In brief, a "rational" imperialist strategy with respect to Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan etc. consists of damage control as opposed to a lunatic charge for "victory." This illustrates why the ruling class needs two parties firmly committed to imperialism, but capable of switching tactics when one option has proven to be bankrupt. Tragically, liberal illusions to the contrary notwithstanding, this switch in parties will have little to offer on the unfolding Palestinian catastrophe. The political consensus of the two parties (and the corporate interests behind them) is still committed to crushing the Palestinian nation through overwhelming force.

Last summer, when Bush blocked the international community's attempt to impose a cease fire on Israel's brutal bombing of Lebanon; Democrats rushed to pass a resolution commending Bush and claiming that Israel's action were legitimate self-defense. The resolution was authored by Representative Tom Lantos and Senator Joe Biden, who will be the party spokesmen on foreign policy. Nancy Pelosi is another prominent defender of Israeli policies. She and other Democratic leaders went out of their way to condemn former president Jimmy Carter's new book, *Palestine-Peace or Apartheid?*, for using the word apartheid to describe the systematic discrimination against the Palestinians.

The Democrats deliberately ran "moderate" candidates in the recent election, including anti-abortion candidates so whether on foreign or domestic policy there's little prospect for much reform. The Democrats' partisan interests, if nothing else, should lead to a thorough Congressional investigation of the substantial evidence of a coordinated rightwing conspiracy to steal elections through vote suppression and rigged electronic voting machines. This is a much more significant question than sideshow rhetoric about impeachment. But the Democrats have little interest in electoral reform.

True, they will not allow John Bolton to remain U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and will block the judicial appointments of the most rightwing and incompetent. But these are relatively superficial: they are not interested in reversing the noxious Patriot Act or stopping wholesale attacks on Muslim charities. Much depends on whether popular movements for the restoration of basic democratic rights can be mounted from below.

Nancy Pelosi, projected Speaker of the House, announced a short program for the first hours of the new session in January. The agenda included scrapping the current restriction that the government cannot negotiate with drug companies over the price of prescription drugs. Raising the minimum wage is another action item. The current minimum, in effect for the past decade, stands at \$5.15 an hour. Given that CEO benefits are now more than 400 times the wage of the average American, doubling or tripling the minimum wage would definitely be in order. Instead, the tepid proposal being floated will raise the minimum to \$7.25, probably in two stages.

Does the repudiation of the Bush gang point to a political opening for the left? Possibly - the only way to find out is to push. Conventional politics are so straitjacketed that the results can present only a distorted and partial reflection of what people actually want. A number of referendums on the state and local ballots indicated some issues on people's minds. Most importantly, in South Dakota voters opposed the state government's passage of a ban on abortion. Millions of voters passed antiwar or impeachment resolutions.

Right-wingers put referendums outlawing same-sex marriage on the ballot in eight states. Interestingly enough, Arizona voted the referendum down, and in the other seven states 38% of the voters opposed the ban (up from a 31% vote against same-sex marriage in the last election). Most disappointedly was the passage of the Michigan referendum voting affirmative action down by 58%.

Perhaps such a vote isn't surprising in a state that has lost millions of jobs. When voters are feeling insecure, it's easier to believe that discrimination is a thing of the past and that we are "all in the same sinking boat."

In America, politics is typically a politics of resentment not a politics of solidarity. That's why the existence of an independent antiwar movement — in which military families march against the war and counter recruiters meet up with youth to confront the myth of the military - is so important in the months ahead.

P.S.

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