

**The
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Three Who See the War Clearly
Reps. McKinney, Serrano and Wexler
by BC Co-Publishers Glen Ford and Peter Gamble

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Only three Democrats voted on the *issue* of the Iraq war, last Friday. The rest followed Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's directives, a continuation of her "strategy" of insulating the pro-war wing of the party, centered in the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), from the wrath of the party's base, which is now overwhelmingly anti-war. For the DLC's sake, Pelosi smothers the party's progressive wing – of which she was once a proud member. Thus, the San Francisco congresswoman maintains the fiction of a united House Democratic front, to disguise the flaccid reality: the pro-war faction has veto power over Democratic Iraq policy – a veto exercised by Pelosi, herself.

Of the 42 Black Caucus members in the House, only one dared buck Pelosi's discipline: Cynthia McKinney (GA), joined by New York's Jose Serrano and Florida's Robert Wexler.

The three faced the choice of defying Pelosi (and, in McKinney's case, the CBC leadership's similar attempts to put forward a face of *unity without purpose*) or to take advantage of the only chance available since October, 2002 to express an unqualified NO to the Iraq war.

After the 403 to three vote, in a statement submitted for the record, McKinney said:

"I will not vote to give one more soldier to the George W. Bush/Dick Cheney war machine. I will not give one more dollar for a war riddled with conspicuous profiteering.

"Tonight I speak as one who has at times been the only Member of this Body at antiwar demonstrations calling for withdrawal. And I won't stop calling for withdrawal.

"I was opposed to this war before there was a war; I was opposed to the war during the war; and I am opposed to this war now – even though it's supposed to be over.

"A vote on war is the single most important vote we can make in this House. I understand the feelings of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who might be severely conflicted by the decision we have to make here tonight. But the facts of US occupation of Iraq are also

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very clear. The occupation is headed down a dead end because so long as US combat forces patrol Iraq, there will be an Iraqi insurgency against it.

"I urge that we pursue an orderly withdrawal from Iraq and pursue, along with our allies, a diplomatic solution to the situation in Iraq, supporting the aspirations of the Iraqi people through support for democratic processes."

(The full text of Rep. McKinney's statement appears at the bottom of this page.)

McKinney and her two lonely colleagues – along with every true progressive in the CBC and the Democratic Caucus as a whole – were caught in a bizarre tango between Republican and Democratic leadership. The GOP, reeling from disintegrating public support for the Iraq war and occupation, and from the media frenzy over hawkish Pennsylvania Democrat John Murtha's call for redeployment of U.S. forces out of Iraq, submitted their own bogus resolution for troop withdrawal. The utterly cynical Republican shorthand language read:

"It is the sense of the House of Representatives that the deployment of United States forces in Iraq be terminated immediately."

Murtha's own blockbuster resolution, a much more detailed and nuanced proposal that will never see the light of day on the House floor if Pelosi can help it, resolved that:

"The deployment of United States forces in Iraq, by direction of Congress, is hereby terminated and the forces involved are to be redeployed at the earliest practicable date. A quick-reaction U.S. force and an over-the-horizon presence of U.S. Marines shall be deployed in the region. The United States of America shall pursue security and stability in Iraq through diplomacy."

The Republicans were baiting the Democrats, knowing full well that the last thing Nancy Pelosi, John Kerry, Hillary Clinton – and yes, Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean – want to allow the public to observe is the extent to which Democrats in congress support a continuation of the war. The GOP, through unscrupulous disregard for the rules and spirit of the House, were determined to flush out the Democratic double-talkers. Pelosi was just as keen to protect them – resulting in last Friday night's spectacle, in which Democrats showered praise on Murtha and outrage at GOP shenanigans, but pointedly failed to voice support for Murtha's redeployment out of Iraq. Republicans came off like the ruthless, lying villains they are, while Democrats railed over ethics and procedure, rather than substance.

There was no room for peace in this strange arrangement, with Republicans daring the anti-war forces to declare themselves, while Pelosi ordered that they stay hidden, so as not to reveal the shape-shifters in Democratic ranks. Cynthia McKinney refused to be put in a vise. She voted "yes":

"A 'no' vote for this Resolution will obscure the fact that there is strong support for withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. I am voting 'yes' on this Resolution for an orderly withdrawal of US forces from Iraq despite the convoluted motives behind the Republican Resolution. I am voting to support our troops by bringing them home now in an orderly withdrawal."

If Nancy Pelosi has her way, there will be no vote on a Democratic measure for quick Iraq withdrawal until after the November congressional elections. Believing that she is playing rope-a-dope with a weakening GOP, Pelosi has so far guaranteed that anti-war congresspersons get hammered, silenced or isolated in every round.

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But she will never willingly go for a knockout – a pull-out from Iraq. "According to one Democratic source," the Los Angeles Times reported on Monday, "Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi... has dropped plans to seek a vote in early December on adopting a Democratic Conference position in support of Murtha's plan."

CBC: The Conscience of the Congress?

Murtha's languishing resolution has 13 cosponsors, three of them Black: Barbara Lee (CA), Charles Rangel (NY) and Sheila Jackson-Lee (TX). By **BC**'s reckoning, a Murtha-like resolution would garner at least 30 CBC votes, probably substantially more – if unconstrained by House leadership. But that number should by rights hover around 40, given the near-universal African American opposition to the war. According to the latest USA Today poll, 95 percent of African Americans call the war "a mistake," compared to 85 percent of Democrats and about half of whites. If CBC members acted on the will of their constituents, all but possibly one Black congressperson would vote for speedy withdrawal. (Only west-central Georgia's Rep. Sanford Bishop could be considered vulnerable to a rural white backlash.)

However, even if Minority Leader Pelosi got out of the way, it is doubtful that the CBC *as a body* would endorse a Murtha-like position in the absence of virtual unanimity, and there can be no unanimity so long as a DLC-centered clique of Black congresspersons is allowed to wield a veto within the Caucus. As a consequence of its vain striving for unanimity, the Congressional Black Caucus cannot even express the conscience of its own constituents, much less the congress as a whole.

CBC chairman Mel Watt (NC) tried mightily on Friday to put a unified face on the CBC. In tones far more strident than usual, he attempted to "make clear" the Caucus' position "so that...our votes tonight will not be misinterpreted or mischaracterized." He then proceeded to paper over the fact that the CBC *as a body* has not taken an effective anti-war position.

Watt said "members of the Congressional Black Caucus reaffirmed our statement of principles as to the war against Iraq" and he sought to give the impression that the CBC had found unity in October of 2002, when the House and Senate gave George Bush the powers he used to invade Iraq, five months later. In reality, four CBC members voted for war: Harold Ford, Jr. (TN), William Jefferson (LA), Albert Wynn (MD) and Sanford Bishop (GA). At the time, **BC** called them "the Four Eunuchs of War" because they "are like the Sultan's eunuchs, for whom submission is a trait of character; the mere presence of Power dominates them, completely."

The "principles as to the war against Iraq" presumably refers to the CBC Special Order of September, 2003, restated by then chairman Elijah Cummings (MD) in August, 2004:

"... the Congressional Black Caucus has steadfastly opposed a unilateral first strike action by the United States without a clearly demonstrated and imminent threat of attack on the United States.

"It has always been the position of the Congressional Black Caucus that a unilateral first strike would undermine the moral authority of the United States, result in substantial loss of life, destabilize the Mideast region and undermine our nation's ability to address unmet domestic priorities. Sadly, this tragic prediction has come true."

That's a position much of the corporate DLC feel free to spout, without ever calling for a definitive withdrawal. However, it's all the DLC-centered clique in the Caucus will sign off on, and they have an effective veto. Unanimity, when unattainable based on progressive principles, becomes a weapon in the hands of a small, corrupted minority.

Individual Black lawmakers in forefront

There is a parallel between Nancy Pelosi's protection of Democratic war-continuers and a CBC that is stifled by the perceived need for unanimity. However, this commentary is meant to point out a practical weakness in CBC institutional behavior, not to besmirch the large majority of Black lawmakers, many of whom are also frustrated that the Caucus is no longer able to consistently act as a true "conscience of the congress" – and a voice that reflects the actual state of Black political opinion. As individuals, Black congresspersons are in the forefront of whatever progressive activity occurs in the U.S. House, including efforts to end the Iraq war and occupation.

In May, 2005, Rep. Lynn Woolsey's (D-CA) amendment called on the president to "develop a plan as soon as practicable after the date of the enactment of this Act to provide for the withdrawal of United States Armed Forces from Iraq; and transmit to the congressional defense committees a report that contains the plan...." Somehow – and to Nancy Pelosi's apparent surprise – the rather tame amendment to a defense bill escaped from committee for a surprise vote on the floor of the House. Despite Pelosi's last ditch opposition, five Republicans and a majority of Democrats (122) voted with Woolsey – 31 of those votes came from the CBC.

The seven Black Democrats that voted against Woolsey's "Withdrawal of U.S. Armed Forces from Iraq" bill were: Sanford Bishop (GA), Corrine Brown (FL), G.K. Butterfield (NC), Artur Davis (AL), Harold Ford (TN), David Scott (GA), Kendrick Meek (FL).

Reps. Harold Ford (TN) and Sanford Bishop (GA) were among the original "Four Eunuchs of War."

The two other War Powers Act supporters of 2002, William Jefferson (LA) and Albert Wynn (MD), voted for Woolsey's "withdrawal" amendment in 2005.

Of the 65 congresspersons that formed the Out of Iraq Caucus in July of this year, 25 were Black, including five of the eight founders: Maxine Waters (CA), John Conyers (MI), Charlie Rangel (NY), Barbara Lee (CA), John Lewis (GA), and Corrine Brown (FL). Rep. Brown had months before voted against the Woolsey amendment.

Original 2002 "eunuch" Albert Wynn, a DLC activist who two and a half years later supported Woolsey, also joined the Out of Iraq Caucus. However, War Powers "eunuch" William Jefferson stayed away.

Here is the irreducible core of pro-war CBC members, all of them either DLC or Blue Dog Democrats:

Sanford Bishop (GA)

Artur Davis (AL)

Harold Ford (TN)

David Scott (GA)

These men are the worst malefactors in the CBC on issues of war and peace, as well as social and economic justice. They and a second tier of four to six other corrupted Black lawmakers combine to prevent the Black Caucus from carrying out its historic mission. Harold Ford's Memphis district is no more pro-war than any other Black urban center – but Ford refuses to represent his constituents. Artur Davis hails from the Black Belt of Alabama, the ground on which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. built an edifice of struggle for justice and peace – yet Davis sides with corporate warmongers. David Scott's suburban Atlanta district is demographically little different than Rep. Cynthia McKinney's neighboring district – but his vision bears no

relationship to the historical Black Political Consensus.

If the CBC's hands are tied by an implicit veto from these men, who are surrogates for forces antithetical to the interests and opinions of African Americans, then the Caucus will fail itself, and all of us. Rep. Mel Watt and the chairpersons that succeed him will repeatedly find themselves hamstrung by the worst elements that corporate money can buy.

Let the Black Caucus be Black!

It's bad enough that Black folks' political fates are currently tied to a Democratic leadership that cares more about preserving a false and do-nothing party "unity" than ending a war. But it is unthinkable that we will continue to allow the *Black polity* to be paralyzed and polluted by a bought-and-paid-for element. At the very least, African Americans must protect their own institutions. Do the opinions of 95 percent of Black America have no standing, even in the Congressional Black Caucus? Can a gaggle of hustlers be allowed to veto the deepest aspirations of 40 million people?

Clearly, the handful (plus a few fingers) of "derelicts" in the CBC must be voted out by the citizens of their districts. The infestation requires great agitation, organization, fund raising, and the application of lots of political Raid to get them scurrying in the open. The CBC Monitor's September Report Card – which will be updated in late January – draws "bright lines" that point to who should be acknowledged and rewarded, and who should be targeted for electoral extinction. *BC* is told that a Black Progressive PAC will soon emerge to help make examples of the worst offenders. And there is no worse offense than prolonging an illegal war, a crime against peace.

It does not help that Nancy Pelosi, a former leader of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, now spends much of her time sabotaging congressional peace initiatives – especially when these initiatives are disproportionately Black. But the Congressional Black Caucus is hampered by its own attempts at discipline, hitched to an ideal of unanimity that became counterproductive as soon as the corporate money started to roll into selected members' coffers.

A "sense of the House" resolution does not require a unanimous vote. Neither should an in-caucus "sense of the CBC" resolution. Speak Truth to Power – the truth that 95 percent of Black folks know. Out of Iraq Now!

Let Iraq be Iraq! And Let the Black Caucus be Black!

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Text of Rep. Cynthia McKinney's statement to the U.S. House

November 18, 2005

Mr. Speaker:

The Republicans in this House have done a heinous thing: they have insulted one of the deans of this House in an unthinkable and unconscionable way.

They took his words and contorted them; they took his heartfelt sentiments and spun them. They took his resolution and deformed it: in a cheap effort to silence dissent in the House of Representatives.

The Republicans should be roundly criticized for this reprehensible act. They have perpetrated a fraud on the House of Representatives just as they have defrauded the American people.

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By twisting the issue around, the Republicans are trying to set a trap for the Democrats. A "no" vote for this Resolution will obscure the fact that there is strong support for withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. I am voting "yes" on this Resolution for an orderly withdrawal of US forces from Iraq despite the convoluted motives behind the Republican Resolution. I am voting to support our troops by bringing them home now in an orderly withdrawal.

Sadly, if we call for an end to the occupation, some say that we have no love for the Iraqi people, that we would abandon them to tyrants and thugs.

Let us consider some history. The Republicans make great hay about Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against the Iranians and the Kurds. But when that attack was made in 1988, it was Democrats who moved a resolution to condemn those attacks, and the Reagan White House quashed the bill in the Senate, because at that time the Republicans considered Saddam one of our own.

So in 1988, who abandoned the Iraqi people to tyrants and thugs?

In voting for this bill, let me be perfectly clear that I am not saying the United States should exit Iraq without a plan. I agree with Mr. Murtha that security and stability in Iraq should be pursued through diplomacy. I simply want to vote yes to an orderly withdrawal from Iraq. And let me explain why.

Prior to its invasion, Iraq had not one (not one!) instance of suicide attacks in its history. Research shows a 100% correlation between suicide attacks and the presence of foreign combat troops in a host country. And experience also shows that suicide attacks abate when foreign occupation troops are withdrawn. The US invasion and occupation has destabilized Iraq and Iraq will only return to stability once this occupation ends.

We must be willing to face the fact that the presence of US combat troops is itself a major inspiration to the forces attacking our troops. Moreover, we must be willing to acknowledge that the forces attacking our troops are able to recruit suicide attackers because suicide attacks are largely motivated by revenge for the loss of loved ones. And Iraqis have lost so many loved ones as a result of America's two wars against Iraq.

In 1996, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said on CBS that the lives of 500,000 children dead from sanctions were "worth the price" of containing Saddam Hussein. When pressed to defend this reprehensible position she went on to explain that she did not want US Troops to have to fight the Gulf War again. Nor did I. But what happened? We fought a second gulf war. And now over 2,000 American soldiers lie dead. And I expect the voices of concern for Iraqi civilian casualties, whose deaths the Pentagon likes to brush aside as "collateral damage" are too few, indeed. A report from Johns Hopkins suggests that over 100,000 civilians have died in Iraq since the March 2003 invasion, most of them violent deaths and most as "collateral damage" from US forces. The accuracy of the 100,000 can and should be debated. Yet our media, while quick to cover attacks on civilians by insurgent forces in Iraq, have given us a blackout on Iraqi civilian deaths at the hands of US combat forces.

Yet let us remember that the United States and its allies imposed a severe policy of sanctions on the people of Iraq from 1990 to 2003. UNICEF and World Health Organization studies based on infant mortality studies showed a 500,000 increase in mortality of Iraqi children under 5 over trends that existed before sanctions. From this, it was widely assumed that over 1 million Iraqi deaths for all age groups could be attributed to sanctions between 1990 and 1998. And not only were there 5 more years of sanctions before the invasion, but the war since the invasion caused most aid groups to leave Iraq. So for areas not touched by reconstruction efforts, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated further. How many more Iraqi lives have been lost through hunger and deprivation since the occupation?

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And what kind of an occupier have we been? We have all seen the photos of victims of US torture in Abu Ghraib prison. That's where Saddam used to send his political enemies to be tortured, and now many Iraqis quietly, cautiously ask: "So what has changed?"

A recent video documentary confirms that US forces used white phosphorous against civilian neighborhoods in the US attack on Fallujah. Civilians and insurgents were burned alive by these weapons. We also now know that US forces have used MK77, a napalm-like incendiary weapon, even though napalm has been outlawed by the United Nations.

With the images of tortured detainees, and the images of Iraqi civilians burned alive by US incendiary weapons now circulating the globe, our reputation on the world stage has been severely damaged.

If America wants to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, we as a people must be willing to face the pain and death and suffering we have brought to the Iraqi people with bombs, sanctions and occupation, even if we believe our actions were driven by the most altruistic of reasons. We must acknowledge our role in enforcing the policy of sanctions for 12 years after the extensive 1991 bombing in which we bombed infrastructure targets in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions.

We must also be ready to face the fact that the United States once provided support for the tyrant we deposed in the name of liberating the Iraqi people. These are events that our soldiers are too young to remember. I believe our young men and women in uniform are very sincere in their belief that their sacrifice is made in the name of helping the Iraqi people. But it is not they who set the policy. They take orders from the Commander-in-Chief and the Congress. It is we who bear the responsibility of weighing our decisions in a historical context, and it is we who must consider the gravest decision of whether or not to go to war based upon the history, the facts, and the truth.

Sadly, however, our country is at war in Iraq based on a lie told to the American people. The entire war was based premised on a sales pitch—that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction menacing the United States—that turned out to be a lie.

I have too many dead soldiers in my district; too many from my home state. Too many homeless veterans on our streets and in our neighborhoods.

America has sacrificed too many young soldiers' lives, too many young soldiers' mangled bodies, to the Bush war machine.

I will not vote to give one more soldier to the George W. Bush/Dick Cheney war machine. I will not give one more dollar for a war riddled with conspicuous profiteering.

Tonight I speak as one who has at times been the only Member of this Body at antiwar demonstrations calling for withdrawal. And I won't stop calling for withdrawal.

I was opposed to this war before there was a war; I was opposed to the war during the war; and I am opposed to this war now – even though it's supposed to be over.

A vote on war is the single most important vote we can make in this House. I understand the feelings of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who might be severely conflicted by the decision we have to make here tonight. But the facts of US occupation of Iraq are also very clear. The occupation is headed down a dead end because so long as US combat forces patrol Iraq, there will be an Iraqi insurgency against it

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I urge that we pursue an orderly withdrawal from Iraq and pursue, along with our allies, a diplomatic solution to the situation in Iraq, supporting the aspirations of the Iraqi people through support for democratic processes.