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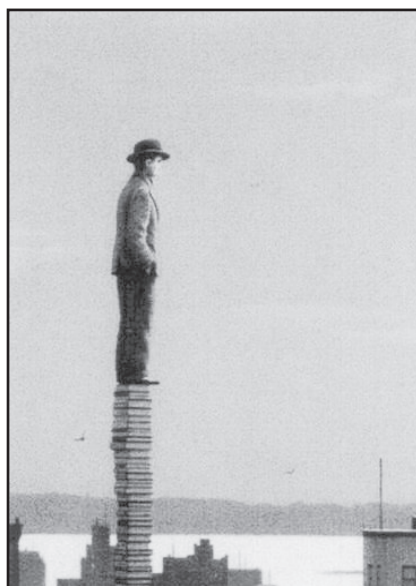
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## The pragmatism of prolonged war

By Norman Solomon

The days are getting longer, but the media shadows are no shorter as they cover the war in Iraq through U.S. eyes, squinting in Washington's pallid sun.

Debated as an issue of politics, the actual war keeps being drained of life. Abstractions thrive inside the Beltway, while the war effort continues: funded by the U.S. Treasury every day, as the original crime of invasion is replicated with occupation.

More than ever, in the aftermath of the Scooter Libby verdict, the country's major news outlets are willing to acknowledge that the political road to war in Iraq was paved with deceptions. But the same media outlets were integral to laying the flagstones along the path to war — and they're now integral to prolonging the war.

With the same logic of one, two, and three years ago, the conformist media wisdom is that a cutoff of funds for the war is not practical. Likewise, on Capitol Hill, there's a lot of huffing and puffing about how the war must wind down — but the money for it, we're told, must keep moving. Like two rails along the same track, the dispensers of conventional media and political wisdom carry us along to more and more and more war.

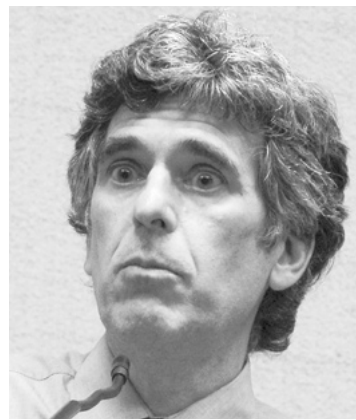
The antiwar movement is now coming to terms with measures being promoted by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Pelosi and Reid have a job to do. The antiwar movement has a job to do. The jobs are not the same.

This should be obvious — but, judging from public and private debates now fiercely underway among progressive activists and organizations, there's a lot of confusion in the air.

No amount of savvy Capitol-speak can change the fact that "benchmarks" are euphemisms for more war. And when activists pretend otherwise, they play into the hands of those who want the war to go on, and on, and on.

Deferring to the Democratic leadership means endorsing loopholes that leave the door wide open for continued U.S. military actions inside Iraq — whether justified as attacks on fighters designated as al-Qaeda in Iraq, or with reclassification of U.S. forces as "trainers" rather than "combat troops." And an escalating U.S. air war could continue to bomb Iraqi neighborhoods for years.



Norman Solomon

The position being articulated by Democratic Reps. Barbara Lee, Maxine Waters, Lynn Woolsey, all from California, and others in Congress is the one that the antiwar movement should unite behind — to fully fund bringing the troops home, while ending the entire U.S. occupation and war effort, by the end of 2007.

We're urged to take solace from the fact that Washington's debate has shifted to "when" rather than "whether" the war should end. But the end of the U.S. war effort could be deferred for many more years while debates over "when" flourish and fester. This happened during the Vietnam War, year after year, while death came to tens of thousands more U.S. soldiers and perhaps a million more Vietnamese people.

Pelosi is speaker of the House, and Reid is majority leader of the Senate. But neither speaks for, much less leads, the antiwar movement that we need.

When you look at the practicalities of the situation, Pelosi and Reid could be more accurately described as speaker and leader for the war-management movement.

A historic tragedy is that the one of the heftier progressive organizations, MoveOn, seems to have wrapped itself around the political sensibilities of Reid, Pelosi, and others at the top of Capitol Hill leadership. Deference to that leadership is a big mistake. We already have a Democratic Party. Over time, a vibrant progressive group loses vibrancy by forfeiting independence and becoming a virtual appendage of party leaders.

Last week, while MoveOn was sending out a mass e-mail to its 3.2 million members offering free bumper stickers urging "End This War," the MoveOn leadership was continuing its failure to back the efforts of the Congressional Progressive Caucus for "a fully funded, and systematic, withdrawal of U.S. soldiers and military contractors from Iraq."

There are rationales for uniting behind practical measures, and sometimes they make sense. But the MoveOn pattern has been unsettling and recurring. Power brokerage is not antiwar leadership.

The U.S. Constitution and the federal courts are clear: Only through the "power of the purse" can Congress end a war. It's good to see MoveOn churning out bumper stickers that advocate an end to the Iraq War — but sad to see its handful of top leaders fail to support a measure to fund an orderly and prompt withdrawal from the war.

On Capitol Hill, most Democrats seem to have settled on a tactical approach of simultaneously ratifying and deploring the continuation of the war. The approach may or may not be savvy politics in a narrow sense of gaining temporary partisan political advantage. But it is ultimately destructive to refuse to do the one thing that the Constitution empowers Congress to do to halt a U.S. war — stop appropriating taxpayer money for it.

In retrospect, such congressional behavior during the Vietnam War — while attracting sober approval from much of the era's punditocracy — ended up prolonging a horrific war that could have ended years sooner. Now, as then, pandering to the news media and other powerful pressures, most politicians are busy trying to pick "low-hanging fruit" that turns out to be poisonous.

"Somehow this madness must cease," Martin Luther King, Jr., said 40 years ago about the Vietnam War. "We must stop now."

Was the situation then essentially different from today? No.

"We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation, and for those it calls enemy," King said. "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late."

When King denounced "the madness of militarism," he wasn't trying to cozy up to the majority leader of the Senate or impress the House Speaker with how he could deliver support. He was speaking truthfully, and he was opposing a war forthrightly. That was imperative in 1967. It is imperative in 2007. ☺

Author Norman Solomon's books can be found at [www.normansolomon.com](http://www.normansolomon.com).