



## *Washington's Wars and Occupations* **Month in Review #31**

*by Max Elbaum, War Times/Tiempo de Guerras*

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### **GET READY FOR THE "BLOODLUST" CAMPAIGN**

Right-wing Evangelist Pat Robertson endorsed Rudy Giuliani for President November 7 with the following words: "To me the overriding issue before the American people is the defense of our population from the bloodlust of Islamic terrorists."

A few hours later, conservative pro-war pundit Andrew Sullivan cut to the heart of this event's significance:

"It seals the deal. Robertson ... represents what may be becoming the consensus among [the hard-line Christian right]: the war on Islamic terrorism is the prime issue; and the way to tackle it is by increasing military aggression, bombing or occupying Muslim countries, preserving Israel solely to hasten the Apocalypse, and entrenching torture as a pillar of American national security policy."

It's not just Giuliani, of course. Rudy leads the pack in "all-9/11, all-the-time" demagoguery. But every Republican presidential hopeful shares his agenda of permanent war and unlimited executive power (with the exception of maverick Ron Paul and – only on the specific issue of torture – John McCain). So it's not hard to see what's in store for the country in 2008: a 24-hour-a-day barrage of racist fear-mongering about "bloodthirsty Islamists" and "invading immigrant hordes," combined with Orwellian calls for endless war as the only way to ensure peace and security.

And the year won't just see campaign rhetoric: there's the continuing creation of "facts on the ground." Consider the White House's latest maneuver to provide legal cover for permanent occupation: Bush's joint declaration with client Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki that the two governments will negotiate a formal agreement defining their "enduring relationship." Integral parts of that agreement are to be (1) a U.S. commitment to support the Iraqi government against all "external or internal threats" and (2) a "Status of Forces Agreement" that will legally codify the unending presence of U.S. troops in Iraq.

### **RESPONSE TO FAILURE**

There's plenty of irony in this latest policy move and in the escalation of jingoist rhetoric. The majority of the population – seeing only disaster in Iraq – wants to see that war come to some kind of end. The conservative coalition that has held sway in U.S. politics since Reagan's time is increasingly divided, and in many respects all this 9/11-mongering is a

desperate attempt to keep deserting sectors in line. The rhetoric is escalating in direct proportion to the failure of right-wing militarism in the Middle East and beyond.

But those gaps between demagoguery and reality don't make it any less dangerous.

For one thing, repeated often enough "the big lie" can sway people. And it can have a devastating impact if – terrible-case-scenario – there is another major terrorist attack within the U.S.

Beyond that, the non-Republicans with the greatest access to media and official legitimacy – the frontrunner Democratic presidential hopefuls – will not be combating Republican warmongering with either the political or moral arguments required. It is noteworthy and important that they differ with key aspects of the right's agenda – in part due to popular pressure and in part because they have concluded that these damage rather than advance Washington's global interests. These pressures, for example, have forced Clinton, Obama and Edwards all to express their formal opposition to U.S. permanent bases in Iraq. But they accept too many of the right's fundamental assumptions (above all, that it is natural and "right" for the U.S. to be "Number 1" and meddle in the affairs of other countries) to demolish the Republicans' arguments or appeal.

That puts the responsibility squarely on the antiwar movement. Only if we rise to it can the issues of war vs. peace, unilateralism vs. international cooperation, racism vs. human solidarity, and democracy vs. torture/executive dictate be projected front-and-center in 2008's nationwide debates and the court of public opinion. And only if our independent message gets out broadly will we both impact the electoral contest and position the antiwar movement to maximize its clout in 2009 and beyond.

### **IRAQ: "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED" THIS TIME?**

The right's latest round of War-Is-Great advocacy is boosted by new media reports of "good news" from Iraq. Deaths (of both Iraqis and U.S. troops) are down the last two months, which is to be welcomed by all. But the mission-is-now-being-accomplished spin is refuted by none other than one of the authors of a front page piece in *The New York Times* (Nov. 20) spun by the right as vindicating "the surge." Here are excerpts from an interview with Damien Cave of the *Times* Baghdad Bureau:

"A lot of bloggers seem to be slicing and dicing our article into a story purely about improvements.... But for Iraqis it's far more complicated. A lot of people I talked to described the current moment as – in all likelihood, but hopefully not – the calm before another storm. And when asked, no said that life in Iraq today is what it was before the American invasion ... the American commanders I've talked to have also offered pretty sober assessments ... one commander whose unit was in charge of northwest Baghdad put it very simply: 'We've got the ball on the tee, but it's not going to take much wind to blow it off.'

"As for reconciliation between the Shiite-led government and Sunnis and Kurds, there are a lot of discussions going on, but so far there's nothing tangible that's come of it. I was talking to a barber today who was telling me that there's still no real sense of law and order, or competence in terms of government services."

“Good news” reports also don’t mention:

- More Iraqis are still being forced to flee their homes than are returning to them.
- Nearly 8 million Iraqis – one in three – are in need of humanitarian aid. Only a third of Iraqis can access safe drinking water. The sewage system has collapsed and only a fifth of Iraqis have access to a functional sanitary system.
- UNICEF estimates that 4.5 million Iraqi children are under-nourished. In some areas, up to 90% of children are not in school.

## **DISASTERS FROM PAKISTAN TO TURKEY**

Beyond Iraq, the human and political disasters spawned by Washington’s policies are all around.

**Pakistan’s** Gen. Pervez Musharraf, a key ally in Bush’s “war on terror,” suspended the Constitution in Nov. 3 and fired a Supreme Court that was poised to declare his re-election illegal. Justifying the step as a move “against terrorism” Musharraf pulled elements of his army back from operations against Al-Qaeda and Taliban-linked forces in order to crack down on a growing democratic opposition. Musharraf’s act – and Washington’s refusal to cut off military aid – made a mockery of White House claims to be supporting democracy in the region. And though Bush says his policies have strengthened the U.S. position in the Middle East, even administration officials acknowledged that Musharraf’s move left Washington with “limited options and lack of clarity about the way forward.”

The pretense of U.S. support for democracy has also evaporated regarding **Egypt** (where regime opponents are imprisoned without even verbal protest by Washington); **Saudi Arabia** (where a woman is sentenced to lashing for sitting in a car with an unrelated male and her lawyer is suspended, again without a peep from either Laura or George Bush); or **Lebanon** (where Washington openly meddles to prevent a new census or a constitutional reform that would lead to one-person, one-vote instead of the current behind-closed-doors version of democracy).

**Turkey** still threatens to invade northern Iraq to assault bases of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) whose guerrillas have been conducting operations inside Turkey. Washington has been trying to head off such an attack, as it would mean open conflict between the only pro-U.S. force with a mass base inside Iraq (the government of Iraqi Kurdistan) and a country crucial to U.S. military supply routes (Turkey). It is rumored that during U.S. diplomats’ last trip to Turkey, a deal was offered (or even finalized) whereby the PKK guerrillas would cease attacks in Turkey and join other PKK units (using the name PJAK) in guerrilla operations against the government of Iran. Washington officially classifies the PKK as a terrorist organization. But such declarations are apparently irrelevant when it comes to attempting “regime change” in Bush’s new “Enemy No. 1.”

## **AFGHANISTAN’S FORGOTTEN WAR, SOMALIA’S FORGOTTEN CRISIS**

Afghanistan is often termed the “forgotten war.” Given how things are going it seems the White House wants to keep it that way. Deaths among Afghans and NATO troops are up. The U.S. air war has escalated and many Afghan civilians are killed by U.S. bombs (including a dozen yesterday). The resulting popular anger fuels the anti-occupation

insurgency. The country is once again the largest source of opium in the world. Middle East expert Tariq Ali explains that "You have a situation in the country where [President] Hamid Karzai's brother, Wali Ahmed Karzai, is well known as the largest heroin and arms smuggler in the region. He's become that because his brother runs the country.'

Though the agonies of Darfur get more U.S. press, the U.N. named Somalia as Africa's number one humanitarian crisis Nov. 14: "Civilians were increasingly bearing the brunt of the fighting between government forces backed by Ethiopia and fighters loyal to the Islamic Courts group." The suffering of the Somali people has many causes. But the trigger for the heightened devastation of the last 15 months was Washington's decision to directly extend its "War on Terror" to the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia was given the green light (as well as arms and funding) by Washington to overthrow an Islamic Court government which had brought a level of stability to Somalia.

### **ISRAEL/PALESTINE: THE ANNAPOLIS CHARADE**

Last, the Bush administration's latest initiative to resolve the Israel/Palestine conflict was on display at Annapolis, Maryland this week. For an assessment of Washington's goals for this event and how/why they do not include ending Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land see Phyllis Bennis' "Photo-Op or Talk-Fest" at

<http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=3800>. And for a report on what is actually happening on the ground, here's an excerpt from Gideon Levy writing in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* Nov. 18:

"A tiny detail seems to have been forgotten: Israel has signed a series of binding agreements to freeze settlement activity, which it never intended to fulfill. Of the 40 years of occupation, only during three has construction been stopped despite all the agreements and promises to do so. There is no reason to believe that Israel will behave differently this time...."

"Of all Israel's iniquities in the occupied territories – the brutality, the assassinations, the siege, the hunger, the blackouts, the checkpoints and the mass arrests – nothing serves as witness to its real intentions than the settlements. Every home built in the territories; every light pole and every road are like a thousand witnesses: Israel does not want peace; Israel wants occupation...."

"This terrible enterprise, whose purpose is to foil any chance for peace, is also a criminal enterprise. According to Peace Now, based on Civil Administration data that have been kept hidden for years, about 40% of the settlements were built on privately owned land of Palestinians helpless to safeguard what is in most cases their sole property that was robbed in broad daylight by an occupying state...."

Today, November 29, is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People – a solidarity needed more than ever.

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