

## **Washington's Wars and Occupations: Monthly Review of Some Key Events & Trends #2**

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Informal notes prepared for the *War Times/Tiempo de Guerras* staff by Max Elbaum.

### **BUSH DOCTRINE: "DON'T ASK. TELL."**

This month leading Bush administration officials lectured and threatened everyone from *Newsweek* to the Chinese government and the Organization of American States. They are following the original motto of the so-called Bush Doctrine: "Don't ask. Tell... America is in a position to reshape norms, alter expectations and create new realities. How? By unapologetic and implacable demonstrations of will." (Neo-conservative Charles Krauthammer, *Time* Magazine, March 2001).

Worldwide opposition to following U.S. orders means Washington does not always get its way. Still, the drumbeat of threats indicates more than imperial arrogance and hypocrisy. It shows how strongly U.S. policy-makers are wedded to the strategy of advancing their reactionary agenda via constant intimidation and military force. Some specifics:

- On June 3, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld told a conference of Asian governments that China's military spending was a threat to security in Asia." This while U.S. military spending has grown to exceed that of all other countries combined! And while the 700-plus U.S. military bases circling the planet now extend from Eastern Europe and the Middle East right up to China's western border.
- On June 10, the White House demanded that Syria remove intelligence agents from Lebanon and comply fully with U.N resolutions. Meanwhile Washington blocks all efforts to enforce U.N. resolutions calling for Israel to end its illegal military occupation of Palestinian and Syrian land. Instead, Washington gives Israel a political blank check financed with more than \$3 billion in aid each year.
- In late May White House spokespeople lectured *Newsweek* about journalistic ethics (the dangers of using anonymous single sources) for publishing a story about Koran abuse at Guantánamo. In a naked attempt to intimidate all U.S. media, the administration blamed *Newsweek* for the Middle East riots which followed publication of the story. Just two weeks later an official military report admitted that there had been instances of Koran abuse - the *Newsweek* story was essentially correct! And the whole package of White House lies about Weapons of Mass Destruction had been based on far less reliable sources than *Newsweek's*. None of this led to even an acknowledgment, much less an apology, from the White House.
- Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice lectured the Organization of American States 35<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in early June. She pressed the body to set up a mechanism for "collectively monitoring" the performance of member governments. It was an open secret that Rice's goal was to obtain cover for U.S.-led intervention against the government of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela (and other governments that might displease Washington in the future). Faced with all-but unanimous opposition from other OAS members, the proposal went nowhere. But there is no indication Washington has slowed one bit in its all-sided (covert, diplomatic, military, and economic) effort to counter and reverse the spread of popular movements and anti-neoliberal governments across Latin America.

## **IRAQ: U.S. STRATEGY SHIFT**

In Iraq, it appears that the last few months have seen a shift in U.S. military strategy. While still trying to train an Iraqi national army, for combat operations U.S. commanders have relied increasingly on ethnic/religious-based militias and “death squad” units. Specifically, U.S. authorities are playing upon divisions in Iraq and have deployed Kurdish and Shia militias to the Sunni areas where armed resistance is largely based.

This strategy is full of pitfalls. It has increased arrests and “enemy body counts,” but there is no sign of success in suppressing the armed insurgency. And politically it runs counter to Washington’s stated goal of incorporating more Sunnis into the official political process and thereby building legitimacy for the Interim Iraqi Government. Last week the contradictions in this strategy burst into the open. Amid growing religious/ethnic tensions, the top Shia and Kurdish figures in the Interim government gave official endorsement to the Kurdish peshmerga militia and Shiite Badr Brigade militia. This embarrassed Washington and angered Sunni leaders of all political viewpoints. On the other hand, an agreement was announced June 16 between Interim government officials and some Sunni leaders regarding Sunni representation on the committee drafting a new Iraqi Constitution. It seems unlikely that this move can stop the current trend of sectarian/religious conflict in Iraq growing rather than declining, or reverse the deep anger in the Sunni community (one-fifth of Iraq’s population of 24 million) at Occupation authorities and the Interim government.

How all these dynamics will unfold over the next while is extremely unclear. But it is against this backdrop that there has been an outpouring of articles in the U.S. press - from influential figures with widely different politics - saying that Washington is losing its war. A sampling:

- Middle East analyst Juan Cole (Cole opposed the invasion of Iraq, is harshly critical of Bush, but does not support immediate U.S. withdrawal): “The US military cannot defeat the Sunni Arab guerrilla movement any time soon for so many reasons that they cannot all be listed.” (Informed Comment, May 25)
- Niall Ferguson (Ferguson supports the U.S.-as-empire and advocates drastic measures to win a U.S. victory in Iraq): “The numbers that matter right now are 174 to 1. That is not only the ratio of Iraqis to American troops. It is starting to look alarmingly like the odds against American success.” (*New York Times*, May 24)
- Seymour Hersh (Hersh is a journalist famous for his coverage of both the My Lai massacre in Vietnam and Abu Ghraib in Iraq): “I don’t think this war has ever been winnable.... the worst times are ahead. The next few months are going to be very disturbing for all of us because Bush has got a real problem in Iraq, and he’s not aware of it.” (Interview with Andrew Burgin and Matthew Cookson)
- And last, an article in Knight-Ridder newspapers June 13 reported: “A growing number of senior American military officers in Iraq have concluded that there is no long-term military solution to the insurgency...Instead, officers say, the only way to end the guerrilla war is through Iraqi politics... ‘I think the more accurate way to approach this right now is to concede that this insurgency is not going to be settled through military options or military operations,’ Brig. Gen. Donald Alston, the chief U.S. military spokesman in Iraq, said last week. Gen. George W. Casey, the top U.S.

commander in Iraq, expressed similar sentiments, calling the military's efforts 'the Pillsbury Doughboy idea' - pressing the insurgency in one area only causes it to rise elsewhere."

Even if the U.S. military command believes this, the impact upon Bush's policies is not at all clear. But top U.S. officers went on record with such statements the same week that Vice President Dick Cheney publicly declared that the insurgency is in its "last throes." This in itself reveals a lot about the disaster of Washington's adventure in Iraq.

## **U.S. STONEWALLS NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION GATHERING**

Because the U.S. insists on expanding its nuclear arsenal, the 2005 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference "collapsed in shambles" May 27. Non-nuclear countries made up the vast majority of the 188 states present at the gathering. They demanded that the U.S. pledge never to attack non-nuclear nations with nukes and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Washington responded with a flat "no." (Background: Since the last review conference in 2000, the Republican-dominated U.S. Senate rejected ratification of the Test Ban Treaty negotiated and signed by Clinton. The Bush administration withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and has pressed forward with the deployment of a "Star Wars" missile defense system. And the U.S. Air Force just announced it is seeking Bush's approval of a directive that would break with previous policy and move toward authorizing weapons in space.)

Even many of Washington's traditional allies criticized the U.S. position. Anti-nuclear activists denounced it, and argued that the Bush administration was laying the groundwork for potential use of nuclear weapons. They point out that the new nukes that the administration is pressuring Congress to fund are considered "usable" nuclear weapons: so-called "bunker busters" and "mini-nukes."

The collapse of this conference received almost no mainstream press coverage in the U.S. But it is an extremely dangerous development and has been denounced by scientists, journalists, and political leaders across the rest of the world.

## **GUANTÁNAMO: "THE GULAG OF OUR TIMES"**

Amnesty International's Report 2005 included scathing criticism of the U.S. for human rights violations. Its foreword bluntly stated that: "The detention facility at Guantánamo Bay has become 'the gulag of our times.'" The report sparked furious responses from almost every top U.S. official: Bush himself called Amnesty's findings "absurd." Amnesty did not back off an inch. Instead, the group included a direct shot at Defense Secretary Rumsfeld in its rebuttal: "Twenty years ago, Amnesty International was criticizing Saddam Hussein's human rights abuses at the same time Donald Rumsfeld was courting him. In 2003 Rumsfeld apparently trusted our credibility on violations by Iraq, but now that we are criticizing the U.S. he has lost his faith again."

Amnesty's report is a milestone for the way it reshapes the image of the U.S. within the human rights community and huge sectors of global public opinion. The U.S. is painted as a gross violator of human rights - not by radicals or anti-imperialists but by the world's leading human rights organization.

## **ELSEWHERE AROUND THE WORLD**

- The government of Uzbekistan cracked down on protesters in late May. Human Rights Watch said their actions "can only be described as a massacre." But the dictatorial Uzbek government is a close

ally of Washington, providing the U.S. with a key military base and allowing the U.S. to send prisoners there for torture. So the U.S. government's response was mild criticism instead of a campaign for "democratic regime change." In Egypt, pro-democracy demonstrators were beaten and women abused – causing outrage and an expansion of the pro-democracy movement. Again, since Egypt's government is strongly backed by Washington, there was only mild criticism instead of threats to take action. Meanwhile Israel continues its latest bait-and-switch move – withdraw from Gaza in order to permanently grab big chunks of the occupied West Bank – with full U.S. backing. Is it any wonder that White House claims to be "spreading democracy" in the Middle East go over like lead balloons with the peoples of the region – and the world?

- In Bolivia, a huge popular movement to nationalize the gas industry forced the resignation of President Carlos Mesa and threatens continued mass action unless its demands are met. The movement of miners and poor urban and rural Bolivians is rooted in the country's indigenous majority. The inability of the U.S. and its elite Bolivian allies to suppress this movement, combined with Washington's setback at the OAS Assembly (see above), shows the growing difficulties Bush and Co. are having in Latin America.
- Bush continues to balk at spending the \$15 billion for fighting AIDS in Africa he announced with much fanfare in 2003. The administration still places its version of religious purity above medicine and saving lives. And despite pressure even from British leader and close ally Tony Blair, Bush is stonewalling on a serious plan for large increases in aid to African nations.
- Big "No" votes on the European Constitution in France and the Netherlands showed a European left with renewed strength. They also leave a lot of uncertainty about the future of Europe's drive toward political unity, with large but still unclear global implications.

## **U.S. ECONOMY: UNSTABLE & UNEQUAL**

Potentially affecting all military and political issues are developments in the economy. Mainstream commentaries on the instabilities of the current U.S. economy are frequent. Items of note include: huge U.S. borrowing and balance of payments deficits; a U.S. budget deficit financed by infusions of money from abroad - including big dollar holdings by China; the possibility that today's limited "economic recovery" is mainly the result of a "housing bubble." Even establishment analysts say that one or more of these factors could explode into a crisis - and shake up U.S. politics in an unpredictable manner. Meanwhile, the gap between rich and poor - internationally and within the U.S. - just keeps growing bigger. To take just one of many indicators, the *Financial Times* reported (May 10): "Real wages (wages adjusted for inflation) in the U.S. fell at their fastest rate in 14 years. In the final three months of 2004, real wages fell by 0.9 per cent."

## **"REAL ID" AND PATRIOT ACT RENEWAL**

Racist and repressive laws justified by the "war on terrorism" continue to be put in place. At the end of May the "Real ID" Act became law. Among other things, Real ID makes it nearly impossible for those fleeing persecution to obtain asylum and deprives many immigrants of their day in court to challenge detention or deportation. It also denies driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, and mandates the deportation of innocent people for unknowingly supporting causes that are now deemed to have connections to terrorism. As of this writing, the fight over renewal of the Patriot Act continues. In a very dangerous development, the Senate Intelligence Committee voted to include in the proposed renewal a

provision giving the FBI expanded powers to subpoena records without the approval of a judge or grand jury in terrorism investigations.

## **MAJORITY SAY IRAQ WAR NOT WORTH FIGHTING**

Public support for the military occupation of Iraq has fallen to its lowest level ever, as measured both by opinion polls and, indirectly, by the military's recruitment crisis:

- A June 7 ABC poll found 58% of those polled disapprove of the job President Bush is doing regarding Iraq. Nearly 60% think the war was not worth fighting. For the first time, a majority does not think that fighting in Iraq has made the U.S. safer. In terms of what to do from here, a Gallup poll released June 13 reported that 30% of the U.S. people want to withdraw all troops from Iraq now; another 30% think some troops should be withdrawn now. A majority - 56% - said they would be upset if more troops were sent to Iraq.
- The military's recruitment crisis is growing. Even after reducing its recruiting target for May, the Army missed it by about 25%. The *New York Times* reports (May 29) that "Recruiters are having even more trouble persuading people to sign up for Army National Guard and Reserve units. The Marine Corps has been missing its much smaller monthly quotas as well." Also important: applications by high school seniors to the Army Academy at West Point are down 9%, applications for the U.S. Naval Academy down 20% and the Air Force Academy 23%. "All together, these factors amount to a kind of referendum on one aspect of George Bush's policy, and that's the Iraq war," said Michael T. Corgan, a Vietnam vet and graduate of, and former teacher at, the US Naval Academy.

Counter-recruitment efforts have been a major focus for many antiwar and antiracist activists this last year. The above figures show that they are producing results. So do articles like the front-page story in the *New York Times* (June 3) under the breakthrough headline: "Growing Problem for Military Recruiters: Parents."

- In the first test of how these changes in public sentiment are affecting Congress, the House voted May 25 on an amendment offered by Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA). Woolsey's proposal was not for immediate withdrawal but stated that it was "the sense of Congress that the president should develop a plan as soon as practicable... to provide for the withdrawal of U.S. Armed Forces from Iraq." It failed by a vote of 300 against to 128 in favor (122 Democrats, 5 Republicans and the House's lone independent).