

Washington's Wars and Occupations:

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THE ANTI-SURGE GETS ROLLING

It's not about Bush's surge anymore. It's the Antiwar Surge that's capturing the headlines and threatening to upset all the warmakers' calculations.

On Jan. 27 "a raucous and colorful multitude" (*Washington Post*) brought their "Out Now!" message to the streets of Washington. With participants ranging from active duty GI's to members of Congress, the demonstration put the peace movement's muscle on display at a crucial moment. Washington's failure in Iraq has become too naked to hide – and the policy-making elite is becoming more nervous and divided with each passing day.

Republican Senator Chuck Hagel says Bush's plan to send more troops to Iraq is "Alice in Wonderland." Longtime hawk and former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski declares that Bush's Iraq policy "reflects a profound misunderstanding of our era. America is acting like a colonial power in Iraq. But the age of colonialism is over."

The wing of the Democratic Party that has been pressed and prodded into a get-out-fast stance has become larger and bolder: the Martin Luther King Day call by John Kerry's former running mate (and 2008 presidential candidate) John Edwards to pull out now signals this important shift. Democratic heavyweights who still insist that it's "irresponsible" to just leave (Hillary Clinton et al) are feeling the heat.

The pressure comes from a U.S. public that is fed up with the Iraq war. More than 65% of the population opposes sending more troops to Iraq. Over 70% think Bush has no clear plan for the war. A majority thinks that invading Iraq was a mistake to begin with. And 64% (including 31% of Republicans) think Congress has not been assertive enough in challenging Bush's conduct of the war!

Worldwide, the occupation of Iraq has caused disapproval of U.S. policy to reach record levels. A new BBC poll shows 73% of people in 25 countries opposing Washington's policy.

Bush's attempt to sell his "surge" has failed so badly the thing has been renamed "plus-up." But the antiwar movement is shouting its real name – an ESCALATION of the war. And activists are laying plans to carry the momentum from last November's electoral "thumping" and Jan. 27's street energy into the coming months.

BAGHDAD: "NEW" STRATEGY WON'T WORK

Today's surge of antiwar sentiment is driven by one over-raiding factor: Washington's total failure in Iraq. The occupation is more hated by Iraqis than ever. Anti-U.S. armed attacks, and U.S. casualties, are at their peak. Sectarian Sunni-Shia violence – Iraq's civil war – grinds along. U.S. troops are not just unable to provide security; their very presence is a major source of insecurity for all.

Since the U.S. invasion, more than 1.7 million Iraqis have become refugees. As Dick Cheney drones on that "we've made enormous progress," 100,000 more Iraqis flee their homes every month.

Middle East expert Juan Cole reported Jan. 26: “Guerillas fired rockets into the Green Zone in central Baghdad. The attack seriously wounded one person and lightly injured five others. The Green Zone has often taken mortar fire, but seldom has suffered casualties. That nearly four years into the war, the U.S. HQ in Iraq is subjected to rocket fire just underlines how helpless Gulliver is before the supposed Lilliputians.”

Even Bush’s remaining supporters don’t think his “new strategy” will succeed. Nine Republicans voted against the non-binding “we oppose the surge” resolution which passed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee 12–9 Jan. 24. Almost every one declared before voting that they didn’t want to “send the wrong message” but they didn’t think sending more U.S. troops was going to work!

EXPAND THE WAR, ATTACK IRAN?

Staring defeat in the face, the John Murthas and now the John Edwardses of the U.S. establishment have decided that withdrawal from Iraq is the “least worse” of the bad options available. The hard-nosed authors of Baker-Hamilton were unwilling to go that far. The Baker-Hamilton team – squarely in the center of the U.S. elite – still holds out hope that some kind of lower-profile occupation, combined with skillful diplomacy, can avert taking the huge hit that would accompany a forced U.S. exit. Their nightmares involve not just loss of direct control over Iraq and its resources (oil), but the blow to U.S. political and military credibility that would ripple outwards from the geo-strategic Middle East to all parts of the globe.

As for Bush, Cheney and Co., accepting defeat in Iraq is simply not yet on their possibility list. (What predominates among the reasons why – from Bush/Cheney’s view of imperial imperatives and close relations to “big oil” to domestic political calculations, messianic religious zealotry and concern for Bush’s “personal legacy” – will have to be sorted out by historians.) Instead, the White House has a dangerous impulse to go in a different direction: try to salvage its lost Iraq adventure by attacking Iran.

Threats to Iran were a prominent part of Bush’s State of the Union speech. U.S. troops have raided Iranian consular offices and arrested Iranian diplomats inside Iraq. The U.S. actions – officially authorized by President Bush – were denounced by the Iraqi government.

A White House campaign blaming Iranian agents for attacks against U.S. troops in Iraq is in full swing. It is part of a larger effort – aimed at Arabs in the Middle East as well as the U.S. public – to fan Sunni anger at Shiites and paint Iran as the main danger to the region. The state-controlled media of Egypt, the Gulf States and Jordan are now making Iran the main target of criticism, putting reports of Israeli violence against Palestinians or U.S. atrocities in Iraq on the back burner. Shia-Sunni tensions – in Iraq and region-wide – are not a simple U.S. invention. But they are being currently used by Washington (and Israel) in an effort to turn attention away from the illegal occupations of Iraq and Palestine and lay the groundwork for justifying new military adventures.

Meanwhile a drumbeat of voices continues to advocate a “pre-emptive” strike against Iran’s nuclear program. (Despite U.S. claims, there is still no evidence of Iran having a weapons program as opposed to a program for peaceful use of nuclear energy.) A lengthy article by Yaakov Katz in the *Jerusalem Post* Jan. 4 (and a similar piece in *The Times* of London) described planning in Israel for such an attack, possibly even including the use of nuclear weapons.

There is at least the beginning of explicit criticism of Bush's anti-Iran policy on Capitol Hill. The new chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, John Rockefeller, attacked the Bush administration's stance last week, declaring "To be quite honest, I'm a little concerned that it's Iraq again."

LEBANON: RESISTANCE FROM BELOW

A one-day general strike shut down Beirut Jan. 23. The main sponsor was the Shiite-based Hezbollah. But few U.S. papers reported that (1) important Christian-based figures are allied with Hezbollah in its protests against the U.S.-backed government; (2) Lebanon's Trade Union Confederation, which includes members of all faiths, called for a strike the same day; and (3) the protesters demands were not rooted in a "pro-Syria/Iran vs. pro-West" frame but revolve around the government's anti-poor-people economic policies and a system of political representation that allots government posts based on long-out-of-date census data and denies one-person, one-vote democracy.

During and after the strike there has been some violence and a number of deaths. The situation is tense. Reports from Lebanon indicate that the country's majority does not believe the threat of large-scale violence or civil war stems from Hezbollah. Rather, they fear that the government, caving in to pressure from Israel and the U.S., will launch a bloody crackdown, after which events could spin out of control.

"INDEED THERE IS APARTHEID IN ISRAEL"

As attacks on Jimmy Carter's book, *Palestine: Peace or Apartheid*, continue in the U.S. media, Shulamit Aloni – winner of the Israel Prize and a former Minister in the Israeli Cabinet – cuts through the fog in Israel's largest-circulation daily:

"Jewish self-righteousness is taken for granted among ourselves to such an extent that we fail to see what's right in front of our eyes. It's simply inconceivable that the ultimate victims, the Jews, can carry out evil deeds....The U.S. Jewish Establishment's onslaught on former President Jimmy Carter is based on him daring to tell the truth which is known to all: through its army, the government of Israel practices a brutal form of Apartheid in the territory it occupies. Its army has turned every Palestinian village and town into a fenced-in, or blocked-in, detention camp. All this is done in order to keep an eye on the population's movements and to make its life difficult. Israel even imposes a total curfew whenever the settlers, who have illegally usurped the Palestinians' land, celebrate their holidays or conduct their parades.

"...there are 'Jewish only' roads. Wonderful roads, well-paved roads, brightly lit at night – all that on stolen land. When a Palestinian drives on such a road, his vehicle is confiscated and he is sent on his way. On one occasion I witnessed such an encounter between a driver and a soldier. 'Why?' I asked the soldier. 'It's an order – this is a Jews-only road', he replied. I inquired as to where was the sign indicating this fact. His answer was nothing short of amazing. 'It is his responsibility to know it, and besides, what do you want us to do, put up a sign here and let some anti-Semitic reporter or journalist take a photo so he that can show the world that Apartheid exists here?'"

TOWARD A SURGE FOR "OUT NOW"

Convinced that the tide has turned, activists in every sector of the antiwar movement are intensifying their activity.

Groups focused on pressuring Congress are swinging into high gear. MoveOn.org – which called on its 3.2 million-member-internet list to support Jan. 27 – just announced “a huge new plan to get Congress to stop the escalation and bring the troops home. We’re planning a sustained campaign with the intensity normally reserved for the final month before an election.” MoveOn has joined with SEIU, other unions and religious and other groups to launch Americans against Escalation in Iraq and put pressure especially on Democrats and Republicans who are not yet committed to turn their statements critical of Bush’s policy into antiwar votes.

In Congress itself a host of bills mandating a U.S. pullback are being introduced, including one by Rep. Lynn Woolsey that repeals Congress’ 2002 authorization for war and provides for removal of all U.S. troops and military contractors from Iraq within six months of enactment.

At the grassroots, the “Put the War on Trial” campaign defending Lt. Ehren Watada (the first officer to refuse deployment to Iraq) has become a focal point for expanded efforts to support antiwar military personnel and bring their voice to ever-wider sectors of the population. The next period will see intensified effort by Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and a range of local and national counter-recruitment groups, as well as other organizations focused on particular sectors (such as U.S. Labor Against the War) or rooted in specific localities. The steadily-growing movement pressing for Bush’s impeachment will pick up steam.

New possibilities exist for more visible expressions of the overwhelming antiwar sentiment that exists in African-American and Latino communities; for more people to see the connections between the Iraq war, the racist attacks on immigrants, and the continuing criminal government policy regarding post-Katrina New Orleans.

For direct action-oriented activists, the shifts in public opinion mean fresh openings to gain support for civil disobedience protest and nonviolent actions that directly confront institutions that are involved in or complicit with the war. The upcoming fourth anniversary of the war this March will be a focal point for protests, including use of direct action, in cities and towns across the country, many called for by United for Peace and Justice which sponsored January 27’s march in DC.

With the antiwar movement’s expansion and the prospect of exercising real political clout come new complexities. Cooperation between groups and sectors that have widely varying politics, cultures and tactics will not be easy. There will be temptations in some quarters to echo the racist argument that the disaster in Iraq is the fault of Iraqi backwardness rather than U.S. occupation. Different groups will have different assessments of different pieces of congressional legislation; of what tactics are most effective at a given moment; of the relationship between the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Palestine, Iran and domestic issues. The anti-empire, and-racist section of the antiwar movement will face many challenges in trying to achieve maximum unity-in-action across all these boundaries and making sure Washington gets no rest at all on its most vulnerable point, while simultaneously expanding the number of people dedicated to long-term organizing against the systemic roots of imperial adventures.

But these are the kinds of challenges it is an advance to have. It is indeed a new moment for the antiwar movement: a time when building an Out Now Surge can make a real difference.

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