



## ***Washington's Wars and Occupations*** **Month in Review #26**

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### **CHAIN OF DISASTERS & THE WEAKEST LINK**

The only thing that Bush's "war on terror" has spread faster than disaster and misery has been opposition to its means and ends. Six years into this self-righteously promoted crusade, Washington is more isolated internationally than ever. Within the U.S., the Commander Guy's approval rating has fallen below 30%. Initiative has passed from those who promote naked militarism and its deadly corollaries to political actors who (in various ways and to various degrees) demand a change of direction.

But the outcome is still in doubt. The core "war on terror" policies of military force, torture, unaccountable executive power, and might-makes-right empire-building remain in place.

The rapidity with which "war on terror" crises shift from Iraq to Afghanistan, from Israel/Palestine to Iran, and from Guantánamo to the U.S.-Mexico border, poses big challenges to the antiwar movement. Protest actions must be mounted on a host of fronts. Large-scale public education campaigns that explain the connections among these areas and more are especially vital.

Yet the "war on terror" cannot be stopped on all fronts at once. Public opinion is highly uneven regarding its different aspects, as are divisions within the elite. Some specific policies are more vulnerable to change than others. The real-life political dynamic is that a breakthrough almost certainly has to come first at the Bush crusade's weakest link: the link where Washington is most blatantly failing, most internationally isolated, and where the widest sectors of the U.S. populace are most discontent. As pressure mounts on that weak link – and especially if a breakthrough victory can be achieved – the war-makers are weakened and there are new openings for gains on other fronts as well.

That weakest link is the occupation of Iraq. And a range of initiatives are in motion for the fall to make it even weaker – or snap it altogether.

## **SEPTEMBER IRAQ REPORT, HA, HA, HA**

In Iraq, Washington has already lost. The administration is now campaigning to lower expectations regarding the promised September report on how "the surge" is going. No surprise there, since 30 dead (and often tortured) bodies still show up each day in Baghdad, U.S. casualties are running at record levels and anti-occupation sentiment among Iraqis is stronger than ever.

The administration's latest anointed savior, Gen. David Petraeus, has already declared that "progress" will not be sufficient to warrant a "drawdown" in U.S. troops. Rather he foresees a long-term occupation, echoing remarks from Bush himself that the White House envisions a "Korean model" for Iraq: permanent U.S. military occupation. Talking so openly about staying in Iraq forever is in part an attempt to hem in the next U.S. President: it's a pre-emptive strike in the "Who Lost Iraq?" blamefest already raging among the powers-that-be. But it is also tacit admission of defeat: Washington no longer can even pretend it is on the verge of "standing down" as a stable, pro-Western Iraqi government "stands up."

Washington's military adventure in Afghanistan is lost as well, at least as far as Afghan "hearts and minds" are concerned. Anger at the daily killing of civilians by U.S. and NATO troops is at a boiling point. The latest incidents – which included NATO bombs killing 25 civilians in one raid – sparked denunciation of Western military forces by U.S.-installed Afghan President Hamid Karzai himself. On June 24 Karzai accused U.S. and NATO-led troops of "careless operations" which had killed more than 90 civilians in the previous 10 days alone.

## **ENTIRE REGION A TINDERBOX**

In neighboring Pakistan, the AP reports that "President Gen. Pervez Musharraf's bungled attempt to oust the country's top judge has backfired, fueling a national protest movement and seriously threatening his political survival." At the root of Musharraf's difficulties is his collaboration with Bush against the will of Pakistan's majority. He stays in power (and in control of a nuclear-armed military) only via a maze of contradictory deals with varying opponents – including his own security services, who are aiding the Taliban insurgents fighting his U.S. allies! This juggling act could collapse at any moment.

Another fragile arrangement threatens to explode on the border between Turkey and the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. Turkish military leaders have massed troops at the border and are threatening attacks within Iraq against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants. The PKK is accused of a series of bombings and killings within Turkey. Turkey's real agenda – linked to its longstanding discrimination against Kurds – is to block any possibility of an independent Kurdish nation on their border. But in the Alice-in-Wonderland set-up orchestrated by George Bush nothing is as it seems, because (1) Washington lists the PKK as a terrorist organization and (2) Washington is simultaneously using the PKK to launch attacks into Iran and fan discontent among Iranian Kurds as part of Washington's "regime change" campaign against Tehran. The tightrope could snap at any time, with the danger that border violence, combined with sectarian killings directed against Turkmen in Iraq, could erupt into all-out war.

The dirty underside of Washington's maneuvers in the Horn of Africa is more exposed as well. The U.S. used Ethiopia's military as proxy to expand its "invade first, ask questions later" policy to Somalia. A front page story in *The New York Times* June 18 reported that

"the State Department, the European Parliament and many human rights groups have cited thousands of cases of torture, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings" by Ethiopian troops.

The *Times* front page (June 16) also reminded the world that "voices within the administration" – in particular Dick Cheney – continue to push for a military attack against Iran. Sen. Joe Lieberman went public with an even louder public call for war a few days later. The Iranian government's anti-democratic crackdown on dissent is both a predictable response to, and more excuse for, this drum-beating for war.

### **PALESTINE: "BUSH HAS CHOSEN A LOCAL LEADER"**

And then there is Israel/Palestine, long at the pivot of conflict between Washington and the Arab world. Responding quickly to the unexpected rout of U.S.-designated (and Israeli-armed) "leaders" in Gaza, Washington is once more trying to construct a "peace process" by ignoring the expressed will of the Palestinian people. For detailed analyses of recent events see [www.electronicintifada.net](http://www.electronicintifada.net) (especially the June 20 piece by Omar Barghouti). Here veteran Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery explains the background:

"What happens when one and a half million human beings are imprisoned in a tiny, arid territory, cut off from their compatriots and from any contact with the outside world, starved by an economic blockade and unable to feed their families? Some months ago, I described this situation as a sociological experiment set up by Israel, the U.S. and the European Union. The population of the Gaza Strip as guinea pigs....

"The timing of Hamas' decision to take over the Strip by force was not accidental. Hamas had many good reasons to avoid it. The organization is unable to feed the population. It has no interest in provoking the Egyptian regime, which is busy fighting the Muslim Brotherhood, the mother-organization of Hamas. Also, the organization has no interest in providing Israel with a pretext for tightening the blockade.

"But the Hamas leaders decided that they had no alternative but to destroy the armed organizations that are tied to Fatah [led by Mohammad Dahlan and nominally] take their orders from President Mahmoud Abbas. The U.S. has ordered Israel to supply these organizations with large quantities of weapons, in order to enable them to fight Hamas... The American aim is clear. President Bush has chosen a local leader for every Muslim country, who will rule it under American protection and follow American orders. In Iraq, in Lebanon, in Afghanistan, and also in Palestine...."

The now underway Summit hastily arranged by the leaders of the Egypt and Jordan (also dictators beholden to Washington) to "show support" for Abbas is the latest expression of this scheme. Like all previous peace plans that do not address the injustices of occupation and dispossession, this one can cause a great deal of misery but cannot succeed in bringing peace to Palestinians or Israelis.

## **MORE TORTURE REVELATIONS**

Two blockbuster reports this month provide new evidence that torture was and is the official policy of the Bush administration. Seymour Hersh in the June 25 *New Yorker* published results of the first interviews given by Gen. Antonio Taguba since his career was wrecked in retaliation for his unflinching investigation of the Abu Ghraib torture scandals. Taguba says "troops just don't take it upon themselves to initiate what they did without any form of knowledge of the higher-ups....There was no doubt in my mind that this stuff was gravitating upward. It was standard operating procedure to assume that this had to go higher. The President had to be aware of this."

Then on June 24 *The Washington Post* began a four-part series on Vice President Dick Cheney. The second installment reports: "The vice president's lawyer advocated the memo's most radical claim: that the president may authorize any interrogation method, even if it crosses the line of torture. U.S. and treaty laws forbidding any person to 'commit torture,' that passage stated, 'do not apply' to the commander in chief, because Congress 'may no more regulate the President's ability to detain and interrogate enemy combatants than it may regulate his ability to direct troop movements on the battlefield.' That same day, [Justice Department Legal Counsel John] Yoo signed off on a second secret opinion... that approved as lawful a long list of specific interrogation techniques proposed by the CIA – including waterboarding, a form of near-drowning that the U.S. government classified as a war crime in 1947."

## **TARGET THE WEAKEST LINK**

Four years ago, even one year ago, articles like these could not have appeared in the mainstream press. Their publication is a sign of how much the political climate has changed. But a change in climate is not yet a change in policy or institutional power. For those, pressure on a massive scale is needed. The administration must be confronted on every one of its abuses and military adventures. In the immediate months ahead, it is especially vulnerable on its Iraq debacle.

Actions to take advantage of that vulnerability are gathering momentum. The Iraq Moratorium ([www.iraqmoratorium.org](http://www.iraqmoratorium.org)), the series of initiatives just finalized by the United for Peace and Justice Third Assembly ([www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org)), the direct action efforts being called by the Declaration of Peace and other groups ([www.declarationofpeace.org](http://www.declarationofpeace.org)), these and more are this fall's key channels for protest. If their strength can converge, if the millions who oppose the Iraq war can be spurred to turn opinion into action, then fall 2007 can be even more of a setback for the war-makers than fall 2006.

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