

## **Washington's Wars and Occupations:**

### **Month in Review #14**

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

## **STILL ALL ABOUT THE WAR**

Karl Rove and George Bush have (again) decided that an aggressive campaign against “cutting and running” in Iraq will advance the right-wing political agenda.

So what if a majority of the U.S. public thinks invading Iraq was a mistake? So what if in Iraq, as Middle East expert Juan Cole puts it, “there is no sign of progress, the killings go on daily”? So what if even the vice-president of Iraq’s U.S.-supported government asked George Bush for a withdrawal timetable during Bush’s visit to Baghdad June 13?

For Rove and Bush, these realities are just background noise to be drowned out by lies, fear-mongering and jingoism, sweetened with periodic announcements of “projected troop withdrawals.”

In the near-term, Rove & Bush calculate that baiting Democrats as “giving in to terrorism” will bring Republican victories in November’s congressional elections.

More important, the administration is still intent on entrenching its framework of “permanent war” as the long-term, defining feature of all foreign and domestic policy. The goal is to normalize constant military aggression abroad and new levels of reaction, racism, and restrictions on democratic rights at home.

Widespread opposition, and increasing cracks within the coalition that backed Bush through 2004, has put roadblocks in Bush’s path. But it has not yet halted the right wing’s “attack-attack-attack” policy, much less begun to reverse the immense damage already done.

## **WASHINGTON AND BAGHDAD: DISCONNECTED WORLDS**

Three mid-June developments spurred Washington’s latest “stay the course” public relations offensive. The first two were items Bush could claim as “good news” from Iraq: the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, which shifted attention from the U.S. military’s Haditha massacre to “getting the bad guys”; and the final posts being filled – after months of delay – in Iraq’s new, supposedly sovereign, government. The third was the U.S. Congress, reluctantly and under pressure, holding a debate on Iraq.

Bush’s “cut-and-run-means-handing-victory-to-the-terrorists” harangues kept wavering Republicans in line, was echoed by most of the major media, and put the squeeze on the Democrats (most of whom are not antiwar in any case). The final votes on two resolutions in the Senate indicate both the degree to which antiwar sentiment has impacted Congress and the uphill fight still ahead. The Kerry-Feingold resolution setting a firm July 2007 withdrawal date for all U.S. forces got 13 votes (with 86 against); a resolution backed by the Democratic leadership calling for withdrawal to begin this year but setting no end date won 39 votes (with 60 against.)

Forcing Congress to even debate Iraq was a rebuff to Bush and a step forward compared to the lockstep conformity of the last four years. But compared to daily realities in Iraq, 90% of what was said in

Washington had a fantasyland quality. (Likewise disconnected from reality was the calculated leak of supposed Pentagon plans to pull out 25,000 U.S. troops by the end of 2007, with the first withdrawals coming conveniently two months before this November's elections: a footnote added that any withdrawal would "depend on continued progress in Iraq" – and virtually the exact same "leak" ran as a news story one year ago!)

Furthermore, even as one Senator and General after another insisted that U.S. troops were essential to "progress" and "democracy" in Iraq, the Iraqi government was finalizing a "National Reconciliation Plan" whose premise is that the only way to gain legitimacy among Iraqis is for U.S. troops to be removed! As Iraq's National Security Adviser put it in the *Washington Post* (June 20): "Iraqis... now see foreign troops as occupiers rather than liberators... The removal of foreign troops will legitimize Iraq's government in the eyes of its people."

Due to intense U.S. pressure, the final version of the Plan released by Iraq's president June 25 did not contain key provisions that had been in draft versions: a timetable for withdrawal of U.S. troops, and "amnesty" for insurgents who had attacked U.S. forces. Nonetheless, the handwriting is on the wall. Tensions and divisions between the Bush administration and the Iraqi government are here to stay. These reflect the rolling disaster which the U.S. invasion and occupation have brought to the country.

## **IRAQ: DAILY CARNAGE**

Since the supposed "turning point" of Zarqawi's death, the killing has simply continued. Juan Cole reports (June 25): "the daily carnage against Iraqis has been enormous in the past two weeks.... The guerrillas, who still are able to coordinate, have just shifted operations to some other cities, or other districts of Baghdad. There was heavy fighting on Haifa Street near the Green Zone just the other day, an area of longstanding guerrilla activity that has been declared pacified over and over again by the U.S. military and press."

Likewise, the *New York Times* acknowledged (June 18): "All the choreographed posturing and a one-week flurry of good news cannot blot out the larger picture of dubious trends and dismal prospects... Take the police. It is meaningless to talk about Iraq taking charge of its own security when the police forces that patrol its cities and run its prisons are rife with sectarian militias and death squads. While Mr. Bush holds out visions of Iraqi security forces standing up so that Americans can stand down, Iraq's deputy justice minister more candidly told The *Washington Post* last week that 'we cannot control the prisons; it's as simple as that.'"

A confidential memo to Washington signed by U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad provides the most telling assessment of all: "Temperatures in Baghdad have already reached 115 degrees. Employees all confirm that by the last week of May, they were getting one hour of power for every six hours without.... Employees all share a common tale their lives: of nine employees in March, only four had family members who knew they worked at the embassy.... We cannot call employees in on weekends or holidays without blowing their cover.... Our staff report that security and services are being rerouted through local provider whose affiliations are vague... The central government, our staff says, is not relevant; even local mukhtars have been displaced or co-opted by militias..."

## **AGGRESSION ACROSS THE GLOBE**

The U.S. being “bogged down” in Iraq, combined with international and domestic opposition, has forced Washington to give lip-service to diplomacy in ways that Bush rejected in the first years after 9/11. But Washington has not removed a single military or “regime change” option from the table.

Regarding Iran, Washington has been forced into an unwanted diplomatic dance where Russia, China and the European Union have some leverage. But the administration has not given up its goal of regime change while publicly focusing on the dangers of Iran getting a nuclear bomb. But the main responsibility for nuclear proliferation rests with the U.S. Hans Blix, former chief U.N. weapons inspector, said June 1 that it was U.S. unwillingness to cooperate in international arms agreements that was the underlying problem. Blix targeted "an increased U.S. skepticism regarding the effectiveness of international institutions and instruments, coupled with a drive for freedom of action to maintain an absolute global superiority in weaponry and means of their delivery."

Meanwhile Washington continues to finance and politically protect an Israeli government that is killing Palestinian civilians daily. As of this writing Israel has announced it is planning a “major offensive” in Gaza. Israel as always says it is acting in “self-defense,” but few in the U.S. media point out that Israeli forces have killed more than 50 Palestinians this month alone and, over the last four years, killed more than 4,000 Palestinians and injured 30,000 more. And who is it that is in need of “self-defense” when it is the Israeli government which openly announces plans to turn its “security wall” into a permanent border, annexing huge swaths of illegally occupied Palestinian land?

In Afghanistan, the U.S. led coalition is stepping up its military campaign against resurgent anti-government rebels, against the background of increased resentment among Afghans against the foreign presence. Opposition is so strong that even Afghan President Hamid Karzai criticized the U.S.-led campaign: "It is not acceptable for us that in all this fighting, Afghans are dying. In the last three to four weeks, 500 to 600 Afghans were killed. (Even) if they are Taliban, they are sons of this land."

As Karzai spoke, word leaked out of a U.N. report that has been kept under wraps for 18 months accusing leading Afghan politicians and officials of orchestrating widespread human rights abuses, including massacres, torture and rape. Although it originally was scheduled for release in January 2005, the U.N. has repeatedly delayed its publication for fear of identifying former warlords now in positions of power, according to several human rights activists.

## **ASSAULTS AT HOME**

An unrelenting assault against democracy at home is accompanying the administration’s militarist posture abroad.

The latest revelation about government snooping is that the administration has been tracking bank and financial transactions without any kind of warrant since shortly after 9/11. Bush & Co. simply respond by denouncing the media for publishing the information and one Republican Congress member demanded that the *New York Times* be put on trial for treason. This is just one more episode in the Bush administration’s crusade to bludgeon and intimidate an already cowed media.

On June 15 the new Alito-added Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that evidence found by police officers who enter a home to execute a search warrant without first following the requirement to "knock and announce"

can be used at trial despite that constitutional violation. The decision essentially repealed a rule which dates to 13th-century England as protection against illegal entry by the police into private homes.

The day before, a federal judge in Brooklyn ruled that the government has wide latitude under immigration law to detain noncitizens on the basis of religion, race or national origin, and to hold them indefinitely without explanation. David Cole, a law professor and longtime defender of constitutional rights, wrote following the decision: “The single most common question I get when speaking about counter-terrorism policies and civil liberties to Arab and Muslim audiences is, ‘if there is another attack, will they intern us like they interned the Japanese?’ Until Wednesday, I assured them that such a response was unthinkable. The Japanese internment during World War II is now so widely recognized as morally, legally and ethically wrong, I told them, that it could not possibly be repeated. But after a decision by a federal judge in New York, I’m no longer confident that I can be so reassuring. In essence, U.S. District Judge John Gleeson authorized a repeat of the Japanese internment – as long as the internment is limited to foreign nationals charged with visa violations (a group that at last count numbered about 11 million people).”

Finally, in the latest government move to legalize and normalize torture, the Pentagon has made a tentative decision to omit from new detainee policies a key tenet of the Geneva Convention that explicitly bans "humiliating and degrading treatment," according to knowledgeable military officials. The move, which is not yet final and could yet be stopped, is another step marking a further, potentially permanent, shift away from U.S. adherence to international human rights standards.

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