

## **Washington's Wars and Occupations: Month in Review #11**

*March 23, 2006*

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

### **BUSH ESCALATES IRAQ VIOLENCE AND THREATENS MORE WARS**

On the third anniversary of the Iraq invasion, George Bush's Iraq policy is less popular than ever before. The latest Newsweek poll shows approval at only 29%, compared to 65% opposition. A first-ever poll of U.S. troops in Iraq shows 72% think the U.S. should get out within the next year. Even conservatives and experts who once backed Bush's war are jumping ship: the latest important defection came March 10 when New York Times reporter John Burns, back from another long period in Baghdad, said he felt, for the first time, "that the American effort in Iraq will likely fail."

Internationally, the administration is isolated. Members of the "Coalition of the Willing" are one by one withdrawing from Iraq. Popular anger at the U.S. is at record levels in the Middle East and across the globe.

Under the circumstances, one might guess that Washington would be looking for a way to retrench. Conservative hawks like William F. Buckley, concerned about minimizing the damage to U.S. imperial power, advise precisely that course: "The administration has to cope with failure," Buckley writes. "Different plans must be made."

But Bush's response is: "Stay the Course - and More." The administration is digging in to stay in Iraq indefinitely. It is escalating the use of violence. It is threatening new military adventures and bullying from Iran to Venezuela to Palestine.

### **NO PULLOUT, NO LETUP**

Speaking to the press March 21, Bush made it absolutely clear there will be no pullout from Iraq while he is President. Asked directly whether there would come a day when no U.S. forces are in Iraq, he responded, "That will be decided by future presidents and future governments of Iraq."

Less than a week earlier, General John Abizaid, U.S. commander in Iraq, sent the same message. The U.S. "may want to keep a long-term military presence in Iraq to bolster moderates against extremists in the region and protect oil supplies," Abizaid declared. Asked if this meant keeping permanent military bases in Iraq, the general said he "could not rule that out." Two-weeks later, Abizaid was rewarded with an extension of his tenure, making him the longest serving commander in the history of the U.S. Central Command.

Meanwhile U.S. forces are escalating, not reducing, their use of violence. According to an investigation published by Knight Ridder newspapers March 14: "A review of military data shows that daily bombing runs and jet-missile launches have increased by more than 50% in the past five months, compared with the same period last year. Knight Ridder's findings were confirmed by Air Force officials in the region..."

"The numbers also show that U.S. forces dropped bombs on more cities during the last five months than they did during the same period a year ago... Stories of American missiles hitting the homes of innocents are passed between Iraqi men at teahouses and during Friday worship services. 'Residents worry that their homes will be bombed at any time,' said Hussein Ali Jaafar, who owns a stationery shop in the town of Balad, north of Baghdad, which was targeted by bombs or missiles at least 27 times between October

2005 and February 2006. 'Most of the bombing is unjustified and random. It does not differentiate between militants and innocent people.'

## **OCCUPATION FUELS SECTARIAN CONFLICT**

These escalating U.S. tactics will fuel - not reduce - the deadly sectarian conflict raging between Sunni and Shia armed groups. A must-read analysis by Michael Schwartz at <http://www.tomdispatch.com> describes the ways U.S. policy has fostered sectarian violence and makes the crucial point - not discussed in the U.S. media - that the overwhelming bulk of armed attacks (80% on average) are against the U.S. military and its Coalition allies, not against Iraqi civilians. The killing of civilians by both Shiite and Sunni sectarian groups and militias is real and terrible, but it is now being trumpeted by U.S. authorities as a justification for continuing the U.S. occupation instead of being acknowledged as in large part a result of U.S. occupation policies. Schwartz writes:

“All the conflicts of the present moment have metastasized and spread from the ill-fated attempt by American-led forces to pacify Sunni communities... Today, not only is the country edging toward an ever-more virulent civil war, but the Sunni resistance is stronger than ever, registering about 100 attacks a day in January...

“This original war remains the central front in the ongoing battle for domination in Iraq and it continues to cast off enough bitterness, suffering, destruction, and rebellion to guarantee its never-ending spread to new areas and groups... If the Americans sought to establish the legitimacy of the occupation by crushing early signs of Sunni resistance, that effort has, in the end, only helped convince Iraqis of the illegitimacy of the American presence. For all its failures, however, the occupation has succeeded in one endeavor. It has managed to undermine all efforts by other parties to establish their own legitimacy and therefore to build a foundation for a new and sovereign Iraq. If one day Iraq ceases to be, splitting chaotically into several entities, the way the occupation destroyed sovereignty (along with parts of Sunni cities) will certainly come in for a major share of the blame.”

## **PRE-EMPTIVE WAR, EXPANDING TARGET LIST**

And it isn't just Iraq. The administration's newest National Security Document officially repeats the so-called Bush Doctrine, in which Washington claims the right to launch a preemptive war whenever it believes another country "might" threaten the U.S.

The document targeted Iran as the most likely candidate for preventive war treatment. "We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran," it said. Administration officials are keeping up the drumbeat of threats against that country, even though Iran's nuclear program complies with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which Tehran has signed. Meanwhile Israel and India - nuclear powers which have not signed the treaty - get the go-ahead from Washington for their nuclear programs.

In a particularly worrying development, the Los Angeles Times reported March 21 that "U.S. intelligence officials...citing evidence from highly classified satellite feeds and electronic eavesdropping, believe the Iranian regime is playing host to much of Al Qaeda's remaining brain trust and allowing the senior operatives freedom to communicate and help plan the terrorist network's operations. And they suggest that recently elected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad may be forging an alliance with Al Qaeda operatives...The accusations echo charges that Bush administration figures made about Iraq in the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion three years ago."

Of course Iran-Al Qaeda ties make little sense, since Al Qaeda is central to the killing of Iraqi Shiites friendly to Iran and has denounced all Shiites, including the Iranian leadership, as infidels. But the Bush administration did not let facts get in the way of its previous war drive. There is no reason to expect more scruples from them today.

Administration officials are also carrying over their demonization of Iran to Venezuela. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told Congress last month that the U.S. was using an “inoculation strategy” against alleged meddling by Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez. Rice called Venezuela a “sidekick” of Iran and the administration upgraded their official assessment of Chavez’ government as a “security threat.”

## **BLANK CHECK FOR ISRAEL**

Bush is also giving a huge blank check to Israel in its effort to forcibly impose an illegal and unjust “solution” on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On March 14 Israel brazenly violated an agreement it had signed (guaranteed by the U.S. and Britain) by raiding a Palestinian prison in Jericho and seizing a number of prisoners. Polls showed that even half the Israeli population believed the attack was in part an electoral gimmick. The other part was a signal to the Palestinians that the Israeli military will do what it pleases and that it has U.S. and British support. Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery bluntly said:

“For a politician to send the army in to collect votes is an abhorrent act. In this action, three people were killed. Many more lives, Palestinian and Israeli, were put at risk....This is not the first time for [acting Prime Minister] Ehud Olmert to walk over dead bodies on his way to power. As mayor of Jerusalem, he pushed for the opening of a tunnel in the area of the Muslim shrines, causing (as expected) dozens of casualties.”

Despite Washington guaranteeing the Jericho prison agreement, the White House did not utter a word of protest at the Israeli action. Nor did the Bush administration object when Olmert openly discarded Bush’s own “road map” for peace and announced plans to unilaterally set Israel’s borders with a huge annexation of Palestinian land by 2010, using the route of the so-called “security fence” as his guideline.

Israel’s propaganda justification for such actions is the claim that it has “no partner for peace.” But even former U.S. President Jimmy Carter cut through to the heart of the matter in a March 9 opinion piece, writing that “The preeminent obstacle to peace is Israel’s colonization of Palestine.”

## **LATEST TORTURE REVELATION: “NO BLOOD, NO FOUL”**

The New York Times reported March 19 under the headline “Before and After Abu Ghraib, a U.S. Unit Abused Detainees”:

“...in early 2004 an elite Special Operations forces unit converted one of Saddam Hussein’s former military bases into a top-secret detention center. American soldiers made one of the former Iraqi government’s torture chambers into their own interrogation cell. They named it the Black Room. In the windowless, jet-black garage-size room, some soldiers beat prisoners with rifle butts, yelled and spit in their faces and, in a nearby area, used detainees for target practice in a game of jailer paintball...Placards posted by soldiers at the detention area advised, “NO BLOOD, NO FOUL.” The slogan reflected an adage adopted by Task Force 6-26: ‘If you don’t make them bleed, they can’t prosecute for it’ ... ‘The reality is, there were no rules there,’ a Pentagon official said.”

## **ALL OUT APRIL 29 & URGENT DEFENSE OF IMMIGRANT RIGHTS**

Protest and mass pressure against all this is urgent. The next big moment for the antiwar movement will be the March for Peace, Justice and Democracy in New York City April 29, initiated by United for Peace and Justice, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, National Organization for Women, Friends of the Earth, U.S. Labor Against the War, Climate Crisis Coalition, Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund, National Youth and Student Peace Coalition and Veterans For Peace. Go to <http://www.april29.org> for full information.

The April 29 action includes a vital call to defend immigrant rights. New vicious anti-immigrant legislation may be up for a vote in Congress next week. Contact the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights for background and action information: <http://www.nnirr.org> or go to <http://www.immigrantrights.org>.

*War Times/Tiempo de Guerras is an all-volunteer project fiscally sponsored by the Center for Third World Organizing. Donations to War Times are tax-deductible; you can donate on-line at <http://www.war-times.org> or send a check to War Times/Tiempo de Guerras, c/o P.O. Box 99096, Emeryville, CA 94662.*