

Washington's Wars and Occupations: Month in Review #17

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BRACING FOR THIS YEAR'S "OCTOBER SURPRISE"

If there is an "October surprise" this year, it won't be much of a surprise.

Time Magazine, the *Nation* and other media reported in late September that a large U.S. navy "strike group" will soon head for waters just off Iran's western coast. The article in *Time* bluntly declared that the deployment "suggests that a much discussed – but until now largely theoretical – prospect has become real: that the U.S. may be preparing for war with Iran."

MINE IRAN'S HARBORS? LAUNCH CRUISE MISSILES?

The U.S. warships slated to arrive in the Persian Gulf about October 21 are capable of mining Iran's harbors, launching cruise missile attacks, or even using nuclear weapons. Dave Lindorff's article in the *Nation* (Sept. 21) said that "First word of the early dispatch of the 'Ike Strike' group came from several angry officers on the ships involved, who contacted antiwar critics like retired Air Force Col. Sam Gardiner and complained that they were being sent to attack Iran without any order from the Congress."

Lindorff adds: "Col. Gardiner, who has taught military strategy at the National War College, says that the carrier deployment is 'very important evidence' of war planning... 'It's a very significant order, and it's not done as a training exercise.'"

President Bush has long insisted that Congress' 2001 "use of force" authorization before the invasion of Afghanistan is all the legal approval he needs for taking any military action in his so-called "war on terror." Col. Gardiner thinks Bush has already made up his mind: "I think the plan's been picked: bomb the nuclear sites in Iran. It's a terrible idea, it's against U.S. law and it's against international law, but I think they've decided to do it."

Other observers disagree that a U.S. attack is certain. They point to evidence of internal dissension within the administration and strong opposition from much of the U.S. military high command itself. International opposition to a unilateral U.S. assault is also more and more visible: U.N. inspectors investigating Iran's nuclear program angrily and publicly denounced a recent House of Representatives committee report which hyped Iran's nuclear capabilities, calling parts of the document "outrageous and dishonest." And French leader Jacques Chirac declared last week that he no longer felt it necessary for Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment program as a pre-condition for further negotiations; this kind of stress on the possibility of a peaceful resolution of differences was an indirect but unmistakable rebuff to Washington's drive toward war. And Iran has re-emphasized its position that its nuclear program is for exclusively peaceful purposes, nuclear weapons are immoral, and talks with the European powers are "on track."

The next six weeks will tell the tale.

TORTURE: IT'S THE LAW!

It's now all but a done deal: torture will soon be the official, allegedly legal policy of the United States government.

Republican Senators John Warner, John McCain and Lindsey Graham made a lot of noise about forcing the Bush administration to "uphold the Geneva Conventions." But the actual text of the "compromise" legislation these three negotiated with the White House tells a different story. Even the *Washington Post* (Sept. 22) cut through the spin:

"On the central issue of whether the CIA should continue using interrogation methods on suspected terrorists that many say constitute torture, the White House got its way... The 'compromise'? The Republican senators essentially agreed to look the other way."

Georgetown Law School professor Marty Lederman was even blunter:

"The text is not subtle at all, and it only takes 30 seconds or so to see that the senators have capitulated entirely, that the U.S. will hereafter violate the Geneva Conventions by engaging in cold cell, long time standing, etc., and that there will be very little pretense about it... the bill would delegate to the President the authority to interpret 'the meaning and application of the Geneva Conventions' 'for the United States.'"

In other words, the Geneva Conventions have one meaning for everyone else in the world; a completely different meaning – determined solely by George Bush – for the U.S.

The legislation would also reverse a currently operative Supreme Court decision by eliminating the power of the federal courts to hear the habeas corpus claims of non-citizens detained overseas or individuals who have been determined by the U.S. to be "enemy combatants." This means that people can be indefinitely detained – held prisoner for life – without so much as a court hearing to determine if there is any evidence whatsoever that they have committed any crime.

As of this writing this bill has not passed Congress and some law-makers have expressed opposition. Grassroots pressure is being mobilized by several organizations including the National Religious Campaign Against Torture – go to www.nrcat.org to obtain more information about how to raise your voice in protest.

NO FORGETTING: PALESTINE & LEBANON

The U.S. media has turned its attention elsewhere. But Israel's ongoing siege of Gaza continues unabated. During the week ending Sept. 10, Israeli military forces killed 9 Palestinians in Gaza, and conducted at least 32 incursions into Palestinian communities. Tight restrictions on Palestinian movement persist; international observers commonly say that Gaza has been "turned into the world's largest prison."

Altogether, since the Israeli military re-invaded Gaza June 25, 257 Palestinians, mostly civilians, including 49 children and 12 women, have been killed. At least 954 Palestinians have been wounded. Buildings of the Palestinian Ministry of Interior, the office of the Prime Minister, a number of

educational institutions and the electricity generation plant supplying nearly 50% of Gaza's electricity have all been destroyed.

Still, the U.S. government paints the "problem" in the Israel-Palestine conflict as Palestinian intransigence rather than Israel's illegal occupation and daily collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

Meanwhile Lebanon is still facing the deadly after-effects of Israel's 34-day hi-tech assault. Lebanon's environmental Minister told London's Independent that more Lebanese are likely to die as a result of pollution unleashed by Israel's bombing than perished in the month-long war itself: Yacoub Sarraf said that a "highly poisonous cloud spread over a third of the country – an area that is home to half its people – from a fire in a bombed fuel tank that burned for 12 days."

The damage done to Lebanon has been confirmed in the Israeli press; a Sept. 12 article in the mainstream *Haaretz* newspaper began:

"'In Lebanon, we covered entire villages with cluster bombs, what we did there was crazy and monstrous,' testifies a commander in the Israel Defense Forces' MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System) unit. Quoting his battalion commander, he said the IDF fired some 1,800 cluster rockets on Lebanon during the war and they contained over 1.2 million cluster bombs.... At the same time, soldiers in the artillery corps testified that the IDF used phosphorous shells, which many experts say is prohibited by international law..."

"The commander asserted that there was massive use of MLRS rockets despite the fact that they are known to be very inaccurate and that a substantial percentage do not explode and become mines... the number of duds [unexploded bomblets] left behind by the Israeli cluster rockets in Lebanon is likely to reach half a million."

IRAQ: FROM WORSE TO WORSE

"The state of terror now gripping Iraq is as bad as it was under Saddam Hussein," reported Patrick Cockburn in the U.K. *Independent* Sept. 22. "Torture in the country may even be worse than it was during his rule, the United Nation's special investigator on torture said yesterday. 'The situation as far as torture is concerned is totally out of hand,' said Manfred Nowak. 'The situation is so bad many people say it is worse than it had been in the times of Saddam Hussein.'"

Is it any wonder that the U.S. war in Iraq is failing, opposition in various forms is growing across the planet and the world is growing more dangerous by the day?

George Bush may not be willing or able to face this reality. But his own government's intelligence agencies get at least part of the point. A classified U.S. National Intelligence Estimate whose contents were leaked to the press "has found that the American invasion and occupation of Iraq has helped spawn a new generation of Islamic radicalism and that the overall terrorist threat has grown since the Sept. 11 attacks," according to the *New York Times*. "The Estimate attributes a more direct role to the Iraq war in fueling radicalism than that presented either in recent White House documents or in a report released earlier by the House Intelligence Committee."

The report shoots a huge hole in Bush's claims that the Iraq war is both succeeding and making the country safer. It's no coincidence that it was leaked at a time when it hurts Republican prospects in the

2006 mid-terms. Most Democrats have leaped all over the report to hammer Bush's handling of the Iraq war.

The President is responding with his usual swaggering denials. He has authorized de-classification of "parts of the report" which are allegedly favorable to his version of reality.

Public opinions polls seem to show that Bush has lost credibility on Iraq with the majority of the U.S. population. It's up to the antiwar movement to make the President's "credibility gap" even worse and make the political costs of "staying the course" in Iraq too great for even Bush to pay. And also to find ways to reach as many people as we can with the message that Bush's Iraq lies are part of a whole pattern of deceit: Lies to justify an attack on Iran. Lies to rationalize giving Israel a green light to batter Palestinians and Lebanese. Lies to justify torture. Lies to demonize and dehumanize Arabs and Muslims. And lies to justify empire-building under the guise of a "war on terror."

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