

Anti-Imperialist News Service

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More U.S. Troops Going to Iraq

On December 1, U.S. military officials announced that they were sending more troops to Iraq and expanding the U.S. troop levels there to the highest level of the war -- even higher than during the initial invasion in March 2003 -- in order "to bolster security."

Brig. General David Rodriguez, deputy operations director of the Joint Staff, told reporters that the American force will expand from 138,000 troops today to about 150,000 by January.

The troop expansion will be achieved by sending about 1,500 troops from the 82nd Air-

borne Division in Fort Bragg, N.C., this month and by extending the combat tours of about 10,400 troops already in Iraq.

One unit, the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division, is being extended for the second time. Its soldiers originally were told they would be going home in November at the end of a 10-month assignment, but in October they got the news that they would remain until mid-January. Now they are being extended until at least mid-March.

Military officials have said repeatedly in recent weeks that they were considering this increase, and may even send additional troops in the future.

Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island said of the new deployment: "This announcement makes it clear that commanders in Iraq need more troops and that this will be a long and very expensive process for the United States," Reed said. "It is still not clear whether Iraq will emerge from this chronic violence as a viable and stable country."

Over 20,000 U.S. Casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan

The November 24 edition of "Stars and Stripes" (the official daily newspaper of the U.S. Defense Department) reports that 20,802 troops have been treated for injuries from the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The figures represent the total number of injured troops treated at Germany's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the U.S. military's primary medical base which serves as a midway point for wounded troops returning home for treatment. The figures are higher than statistics previously reported by the Pentagon.

According to Pentagon officials, the U.S. casualty trend since June has been "troubling." The month of November, for example, which included the U.S. military assault on the city of Fallujah, has been one of the deadliest for American troops in Iraq since the invasion. At least 135 U.S. troops were killed in Iraq in November, the highest of any month.

Secretary of State, Donald Rumsfeld, told a Pentagon news conference on November 24 "No doubt attacks [on U.S. troops] will continue in the weeks and months ahead, and perhaps intensify."

15,000 March Against Bush in Ottawa

On November 30, a crowd of at least 15,000 people rallied at Ottawa city hall, protesting Bush's visit to Canada.

Demonstrators from Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and all surrounding areas converged on Ottawa for a noon rally and march.

Under the theme "George W. Bush is not welcome in Ottawa," speakers repeatedly denounced Bush as a war criminal and condemned the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

By the time the march reached its final destination at Parliament hill, the crowd swelled, covering the large front lawn of the parliament with anti-war banners, placards and slogans.

On December 1, an estimated 4,000 demonstrators took to the streets for another march in Halifax, protesting Bush's visit.

Plan Colombia Benefits U.S. Oil Companies

According to recent reports published by the New Colombia News Agency, U.S. oil companies are increasing their ownership and exploitation of Colombia's oil resources.

In an article posted on November 16, the New Colombia News Agency writes;

"In addition to providing half a billion dollars a year in Plan Colombia aid during his first term, President Bush has . . . Deployed U. S. Army Special Forces troops to protect a major oil pipeline. The escalating U.S. military intervention in Colombia, along with International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed economic reforms, has created favorable conditions for foreign companies such as Harken seeking to exploit Colombia's oil reserves.

"U.S. military aid is providing a secure environment in which U.S. oil companies can operate in Colombia. In conjunction with military aid, IMF structural adjustment programs are creating an economic environment favorable to foreign companies.

"In return for loans in December 1999 and January 2004 totaling almost 5 billion, the IMF demanded that Colombia re-

structure state-owned entities. Accordingly, President Alvaro Uribe has restructured Colombia's state oil company Ecopetrol over the past two years, providing favorable investment conditions for foreign oil companies.... Harken Energy is the latest oil company to benefit from the United States' escalating involvement in Colombia. On November 4, the Texas-based company announced the signing of a new oil exploration and production contract in Colombia. The company is closely linked to President George W. Bush who served on its board of directors from 1986 until 1990.

"Harken's November 4 press release stated that its subsidiary Global Energy Development PLC "will own 100% of the contract subject only to an initial 8% royalty payable to the Colombian Ministry of Energy." Harken goes on to note that the "contract grants Global exclusive exploration and production rights to 85,000 acres which adjoin the established, producing Palo Blanco field," which has "proved reserves of approximately 1.8 million net barrels."

Occidental Petroleum

Along these same lines, Occidental Petroleum, another U.S. corporation, is also increasing its ownership and exploitation of Colombia's oil.

Currently Occidental is operating 264 wells in Cano Limon, near the Venezuelan border. These wells yield 98,000 barrels per day. Each barrel is enough to produce 21 gallons of gasoline, 4 of kerosene, 2 of asphalt, 1 of petrochemical derivatives, lubricants, fuel oil and motor fuel.

According to the New Colombia News Agency, "under a contract named Cravo Norte, Occidental de Colombia and Ecopetrol participated in the activities in the Caño Limón field under the form of associations. The associations were 40 % for the U.S. company, 40 % for the Colombian state company, and 20% for the state. Participation was structured through royalties. At the same time, the state participation was also distributed: 47% for the regional government, 32% for the National Royalty Fund, 12% for the municipality, and 8% for the municipality of the port where the production is shipped.

"But this contract, which stipulated that the field, as well as the infrastructure, would be turned over to the Colombian state upon its expiration in 2008, was modified last year with the signature of a new agreement called Chipiroil agreement.

"And not only was the participation structure altered in that contract. At this moment, Occidental de Colombia owns 70% of the property against 30% owned by Colombia. The worst part is that the reservoir has been granted for good. But furthermore, after a negotiation by the National Hydrocarbon Agency, royalty payments were reduced to from 20% to only 8%, which means we are walking in a direction that is totally opposite to the trend followed by Venezuela, which increased royalty payments from 1% to 16 2/3%."

Malnutrition Rate for Iraqi Children Soars

On November 23, the U.N. children's agency (UNICEF) reported that the malnutrition rate for children in Iraq has doubled since the start of the U.S. invasion.

The agency said fighting was "wreaking havoc" throughout the country and there was little it could do to ease the plight of children because most relief agencies are being prevented from conducting operations in the country. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children are suffering from diarrhea and nutrition deficiencies as a result, UNICEF chief Carol Bellamy said.

Another survey by the Norway-based Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science said that since the March 2003 invasion, malnutrition among children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years old has grown to 7.7 percent from 4 percent.

That figure means roughly 400,000 Iraqi children are suffering from "wasting," a condition characterized by chronic diarrhea and dangerous deficiencies of protein. "These figures clearly indicate the downward trend," said Alexander Malyavin, a child health specialist with the UNICEF mission to Iraq.

Iraq's child malnutrition rate now roughly equals that of Burundi, and is far higher than rates in Uganda and Haiti.

"The people are astonished," said Khalil M. Mehdi, who directs the Nutrition Research Institute in Iraq. He and other analysts attributed the increase in malnutrition to dirty water and to unreliable supplies of the electricity needed to make it safe by boiling.

According to studies, 60 percent of rural residents and 20 percent of urban dwellers have access only to contaminated water.