

March
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IRAQ, SEVEN YEARS LATER

Change US Foreign Policy-Bring All the Troops Home!



In an effort to assure the Iraqis that there is now a "change in mission," the occupation of Iraq will be renamed from "Operation Iraqi Freedom" to "Operation New Dawn" on September 1 (Agence France Presse, February 19). Meanwhile, the family pictured above had to walk 25 minutes to the voting polls through rubble and trash in March 2010 (Washington Post, March 8).

End the Occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine

The U.S. war against Iraq really began 20 years ago, in August 1990 when the most stringent sanctions regime in history was imposed, followed by "Operation Desert Storm" (aka "The Gulf War") and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. When the U.S. invaded in March, 2003 on the premise that Iraq was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction (they weren't), thousands more died. The ensuing rebellion against U.S. occupation and internal fighting provoked by the instability has killed thousands more. Over 4300 U.S. military personnel have died since 2003, less well known are the roughly 32,000 others wounded in combat and over 38,000 injured in "non-combat" situations (Associated Press [AP], March 1). Some put the death toll in Iraq at over one million; even the relatively conservative website iraqbodycount.org, which only tallies deaths reported in news sources, lists roughly 100,000 Iraqis dead in 7 years.

100,000 is also about the number of U.S. troops still in Iraq, despite perception that the occupation has ended (on Feb. 16, AP reported the number at 98,000). President Obama has promised to bring back all but 50,000 of the troops by August, and "all the troops" by the end of 2011. However, political instability, particularly with the unknown outcomes of the March 7 election, have led to rumors that the U.S. may leave troops indefinitely. Even with the draw-down, there are tens of thousands of "contractors" working for the U.S. in Iraq, and military personnel will remain as "advisors" and to guard the world's largest embassy, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.

Other fallout from the years of bombs and warfare includes an increase in cancers and birth defects. Middle East Online reported February 16 that "In Falluja, which was heavily bombarded by the US in 2004, as many as 25% of new-born infants have serious abnormalities, including congenital anomalies, brain tumors, and neural tube defects in the spinal cord... Iraqi doctors and some Western scholars say the massive quantities of depleted uranium used in US and British bombs, and the sharp increase in cancer rates are not unconnected."

Meanwhile, the second parliamentary election to take place since the invasion showed a drop in voter turnout. One difference may be that there was more violence this year—38 people were killed, mainly at polling sites. The turnout was just 62%, compared to the 75% figure five years ago (BBC, March 8).

Interestingly, the U.S. forced Iraq to carve out 25% of the parliament's seats for women—while our House of Representatives is only 17% female, and only 15 of 100 Senators are women (AP, March 3).

It is unclear whether Nouri Al Maliki, a Shia who has generally been friendly to U.S. wishes, will hold onto power as Prime Minister, or whether the rise in power by the Iraq National Alliance (connected to the cleric Moqtada Al Sadr) and the secular Shia faction of previous Prime Minister Ayad Allawi (who has support of many Sunnis) will cause a change in leadership. While Maliki often appears to be operating at the behest of the U.S., he and Al Sadr both have strong ties to Iran, while it is said Allawi (formerly on the CIA payroll) would help "contain" Iran (Juan Cole's Informed Consent, March 8).

America's other occupation, which began with the October, 2001 attack on Afghanistan, has caused more U.S. and Afghan casualties since President Barack Obama's election. 630 U.S. military personnel lost their lives in the 7+ years from 2001-2008, but just in the 15 months from January, 2009 to March, 2010, 290 soldiers died—over twice the previous rate—bringing the total to over 1000. Nobody knows how many Afghans have died, but a UN report says 2400 civilians were killed in 2009—more than any other year of the conflict. 346 of those who died were children, 131 of whom were killed by NATO military operations, mostly airstrikes (Deutsche Presse Agentur [DPA], Feb. 24).

Birth defects similar to those in Iraq are found in Afghanistan as well. An Afghan Doctor "found evidence of the effect of depleted uranium in infants in eastern and south-eastern Afghanistan. 'Many children are born with no eyes, no limbs, or tumors protruding from their mouths and eyes,'" (Middle East Online, Feb. 16).

America's third occupation is arguably in the form of military and financial aid to Israel, which has occupied and/or laid siege to the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza since 1967. Israel receives roughly \$2.5 billion in aid each year. By downplaying the one-sided nature of the massive bombardment of Gaza in early 2009—in which over 1400 Palestinians were killed, but only 15 Israelis—the U.S. has shown its lack of neutrality. The U.S. tried squelching the "Goldstone Report," a publication by a (over)



In Jan. 2009 a man watches the UN compound in Gaza burn after an Israeli missile strike (AP photo)

Jewish South African judge who reported on possible war crimes committed by both Hamas and Israel's military.

But perhaps the tide is turning. *Foreign Policy* magazine revealed on March 13 that Gen. David Petraeus' team made an "unprecedented" presentation to Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Admiral Michael Mullen, stating that "Israeli intransigence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was jeopardizing U.S. standing in the region." Vice President Joe Biden criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for plans to build settlements in Palestinian East Jerusalem, saying, in essence, that "since many people in the Muslim world perceived a connection between Israel's actions and US policy, any decision about construction that undermines Palestinian rights in East Jerusalem could have an impact on the personal safety of American troops fighting against Islamic terrorism."

Stop the Expanding Attacks in the Middle East: No Drone Strikes in Pakistan

The U.S. war in the Middle East has been spreading since September 11, 2001. As suspected Al Qaeda members crossed the border from Afghanistan, President Bush began using unmanned "drone" aircraft to drop bombs in Pakistan. President Obama increased the use of drones, operated remotely from command centers in the western U.S. Because drones' cameras show the damage their bombs do, many operators experience post traumatic stress (AP, August 8, 2008).

The New America Foundation reports that of 114 drone strikes in Pakistan from 2004 to January, 2010, between 834 and 1216 people were killed, 32% of whom were civilians. In 2009 alone, there were 51 drone strikes, compared to 45 total in 5 years under President Bush (*Dawn*, March 2).

Legal scholars question whether drone strikes are legal under UN charter article 2, which criminalizes any breach of another country's "territorial integrity" by force. However, the U.S. claims that Pakistan has consented to their use and thus the bombings are legal (*Dawn*, January 27).

After three U.S. soldiers died in a suicide attack in early February, Pakistan revealed that some 200 US "advisors" are operating on the ground, indicating that the war is indeed expanding (*NY Times*, February 4).

The US has also dropped bombs in Somalia and Yemen ostensibly to fight "terrorism." American "advisors" are also helping the Somali military in efforts to stabilize the country. "You're likely to see airstrikes and Special Ops moving in, hitting and getting out" (*NY Times*, March 5). In Yemen, where U.S. cruise missiles were launched against "suspected Al Qaeda" sites in December, Defense Secretary Robert Gates more than doubled military assistance to \$150 million. That figure "does not include covert U.S. assistance for Yemen" (Reuters, February 22). *Asia Times* columnist Pepe Escobar suggests that the U.S. is delighting in its involvement in Yemen and Somalia, since oil shipped from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean must travel between the countries, potentially giving the U.S. the ability to control the global flow of oil (January 12).

No War on Iran

Despite President Obama's efforts to resolve disputes with Iran diplomatically, pressure seems to be building for military

confrontation. While much is made of Iran's nuclear program, their main reactor is used to create medical isotopes. That uranium only needs to be enriched to 20%, unlike the 90% needed for weapons (AP, February 10).

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak signalled that his country might attack Iran without U.S. approval: "We never asked the Americans to come and fight for us. To paraphrase Churchill, we said, 'Give us the tools and we will do the job'" (Reuters, February 26). Israel dropped bombs on a reactor in Iraq in 1981, and an alleged nuclear site in Syria in 2007.

The people of Iran have been organizing and protesting, despite serious crackdowns from their government. U.S. interference, whether in the form of direct support (which leads to Iranian suspicion that the indigenous democracy movement is U.S.-backed) or

military threats (which tends to rally Iranians around their own government) are not helping. Another war front in the region will surely lead to further death and destruction, so the US and Israel must find other means to negotiate. After all, the 1991 cease fire

agreement that ended the "Gulf War" called for a "nuclear-weapons-free zone in the region of the Middle East" (Security Council Resolution 687). Iran can point to American hypocrisy for turning a blind eye to Israel's not-so-secret nuclear weapons until such a future becomes real.

Troops+Bad Foreign Policy, But Hope for Peace

The US has also recently: deployed troops to Haiti for the third time in 20 years (1994, 2004 and 2010); stationed troops in Colombia (to "fight drugs"); stationed troops off the coast of Venezuela, and supported the military coup in Honduras—all the while refusing to shut down the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation" (also known as the School of the Americas), which trains torturers from Latin American countries.

And yet, there is hope for peace. On March 10, Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich's resolution to bring home all the troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2010. received 65 votes (including Oregon Rep. Peter Defazio), showing our government is not united in wanting to escalate endless military involvement. "Peace Mom" Cindy Sheehan set up an encampment at the Washington Monument starting March 15, pledging to stay until the troops come home from Afghanistan. On March 8, Portlanders opposed the School Board's use of the military's "educational" STARBASE program, coming just one vote shy of defeating it. As Dorothy Day said, "No one has the right to sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do."



Predator drone firing a Hellfire missile (Air Force photo)

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