U.S. OUT OF THE "MIDDLE EAST"
IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, IRAN…

March 19, 2008 marks exactly five years since the US launched one of the most overwhelming military attacks in human history, raining "shock and awe" on the country of Iraq, killing thousands and knocking out most of what remained of the country's fragile infrastructure. In addition, the US invaded Afghanistan in October, 2001, presumably to root out Al Qaeda and bring stability, yet the situation there has also deteriorated. The March 11 resignation of Admiral William Fallon, the commander of US Forces in the "Middle East," has led to speculation that there may be military action taken against Iran in the months leading up to the elections this fall.

Just in 2008, the US has bombed four countries in the region— Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan. On March 3, a missile strike injured at least 8 Somalis, four of them children, as the Americans claimed to be targeting an "*Islamic group with ties to Al Qaeda*" (MSNBC, March 3). On January 29, the CIA used a remote-controlled plane to bomb an alleged Al Qaeda commander in Pakistan, not asking permission from that country's government until the operation was underway (*Washington Post*, February 19).

US Central Command
(The "Middle East" +
East Africa & Central Asia)

The US' intentions are not to eliminate "terrorism," but to dominate the "Middle East" region, for strategic military purposes and to control its resources. Former US Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan wrote in his memoir, "*I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil*" (*Observer*, September 16, 2007).

IRAQ FOR IRAQIS NOW—US OUT!

Roughly 4000 American service people and, anywhere from 82,000 (iraqbodycount.org) to 700,000 (the *Lancet* medical journal, October 2006) or more Iraqis have lost their lives in the aftermath of the US invasion and occupation. Meanwhile, President George W. Bush is negotiating a long-term agreement with the current Iraqi government for the US to remain in Iraq indefinitely, with promises to "*provide security assurances to the Iraqi Government to deter any external aggression and to ensure the integrity of Iraq's territory*" (*Army Times*, March 5). The Administration's position is that "*the 2002 congressional authorization to go to war in Iraq gives it the authority to conduct combat operations in Iraq and negotiate far-reaching agreements with the current Iraqi government without consulting Congress.*"
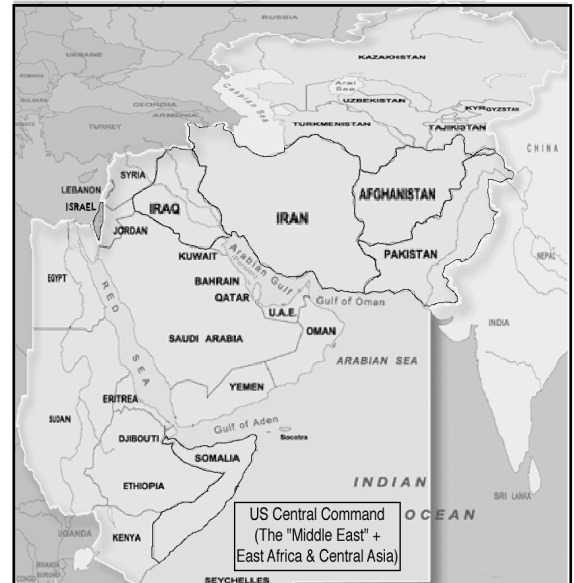
As it happens, that 2002 authorization was based on the alleged threat to the U.S. posed by Saddam Hussein, who was captured and killed by the US and its partners in the new Iraqi regime. That law also cited Iraq's "*development of weapons of mass destruction*" and the September 11, 2001 attacks, allegedly perpetrated by Al Qaeda. Yet on March 13, 2008. the Pentagon released a study that "*found no smoking gun (i.e. direct connection) between Saddam's Iraq and Al-Qaeda*" (Agence France Presse, March 13), and in October, 2004, Charles Duelfer, head of the Iraq Survey Group, told the Senate that "t*he group found no evidence that Iraq under Saddam Hussein had produced and stockpiled any weapons of mass destruction since 1991*" (Rep. John Dingell, October 23, 2007).

SALAAM

IRAQ FOR IRAQIS NOW

A massive embassy, roughly the size of the Vatican, is nearing completion, though shoddy workmanship is holding up its official use. When finished, it will house over 1000 US diplomats and military personnel, at a cost of roughly $750 million (McClatchy, February 27). President Bush, in a "signing statement," asserted that he does not have to comply with part of a defense bill which prohibits "*using federal funds to establish permanent US military bases in Iraq*" (*Boston Globe*, January 20). As many as 14 permanent, or "enduring," bases have been or are being built (see http://www.fcnl.org/iraq/bases.htm).

END THE OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan, while touted to be a great success of the US "War on Terror," has steadily become more deadly for American forces. Nearly 500 US troops have died since 2001, with the numbers rising from roughly 50 a year in 2002-2004 to about 100 per year in 2005-2007 (www.icasualties.org/oef). US Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell told Congress that President Hamid Karzai "*controls about 30% of Afghanistan, the Taliban 10%, and the remainder is under tribal control,*" and the security situation is "*deteriorating*" (*Guardian*, February 29). The situation for Afghan women, once used as a political example of the US invasion's success, is "*worse than ever,*" with "*an increasing number of Afghan families sell[ing] their daughters into forced marriages*" (*Independent*, February 25).

The situation for Iraqi women has also become a nightmare—a 2008 study showed "*Almost two-thirds of the 1,500 women questioned for the national survey said violence against them had increased*" (BBC News, March 6).

An analysis of US interests in Iraq by noted journalist John Pilger shows that America's interest in building an oil pipeline across Afghanistan may have sealed the fate of the Taliban even prior to 2001. The events of 9/11 gave an excuse to invade and occupy the country (*New Statesman*, January 10).

DON'T ATTACK IRAN

An early January, 2008 incident nearly triggered a massive attack against Iran. The US accusation that tiny Iranian speedboats threatened to blow up American military ships turned out to be at best an exaggeration by the US—voices they edited onto a video of the boats were coming from another source (ABC News, January 10). The fact that the warships remain off the coast of Iran makes it clear that a US-launched attack is still a possibility. Some speculate that when Iran puts its first nuclear power plant at Bushehr on line later in 2008 (AP, December 30, 2007) the Israelis may launch an attack as a proxy for the US.

Admiral Fallon resigned because he feared his perceived opposition to President Bush's Iran policy—an article in Esquire portrayed him as "*the lone voice against taking military action to stop the Iranian nuclear program*"—was a "*distraction hampering his efforts in the Middle East*" (AP, March 11). Interestingly, Fallon also favors a quicker drawdown of troops from Iraq than Gen. David Petraeus, his subordinate there. Illustrating the US interest in the whole region, "*Fallon's area of responsibility includes Iran and stretches from Central Asia across the Middle East to the Horn of Africa.*"

END THE SIEGE OF GAZA, RESTORE INTERNATIONAL STABILITY

Meanwhile, following its massive bombardment of civilians while targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, Israel conducted airstrikes in the Gaza Strip beginning in February in the name of controlling Hamas—the elected leadership in that part of the Palestinian territories. In a frightening choice of words, Israel's Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai said "*The more [home-made rocket] fire intensifies and the rockets reach a longer range, [the Palestinians] will bring upon themselves a bigger holocaust because we will use all our might to defend ourselves*" (*UK Times*, March 1).

These kinds of incursions into other lands are becoming more and more common since the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. (It is also worthy noting that what triggered the original "Gulf War" in 1991 was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, when Iraq said Kuwait was slant-drilling for oil under the Iraqi border.) Behind the fighting in Somalia that led to the US airstrikes was an invasion by Ethiopia in 2007. From February 21-29, 2008, Turkey invaded an area of northern Iraq to kill Kurdish independence fighters, with perhaps 240 Kurds and 27 Turks losing their lives (Reuters, February 29). Colombian forces crossed the border to Ecuador to conduct a raid on suspected leaders of a rebel group, nearly setting off another international crisis as Venezuela and Ecuador mobilized troops in response (Reuters, March 5). All of these incidents occurred with the explicit or implicit approval and support of the United States.

The United Nations was created to prevent wars as a means of resolving international disputes. As it continues to be manipulated by the US, more people see the UN as a tool of imperialistic countries, leading to attacks against UN staff in Iraq in 2003 and Algeria in 2007 (AFP, February 29).

HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE— BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW

All of this seems overwhelming for ordinary citizens. While we may be powerless as individuals to stop the wars and occupations, we can work together to call for an end to violations of international law. As the US continues to defend its use of torture (On March 8, President Bush vetoed a bill that would have prohibited the CIA from using "waterboarding" and Congress was unable to over-ride it) and to push for military solutions, people need to come together and demand change. At this time, the change is not likely to come from any of the front-runners for President—a *New York Times* article on February 24 described the difference between Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and Republican John McCain as McCain thinking the "war" in Iraq needs more attention, while Clinton and Obama favor putting more troops in Afghanistan. Therefore, the people have to find creative ways to call for all the troops to come home. In late January, a bill was introduced in the Vermont legislature that called for the return of their National Guard troops, because the 2002 authorization of force in Iraq no longer has legal meaning. Building on resolutions passed in Oregon's house and senate in 2007, we can consider looking at this as a model for Oregon to halt the planned deployment of some 3500 guardspeople to Iraq in 2009.

Five years of occupation has forced millions of people to flee their homes in Iraq, while thousands of others continue to die from violence, malnutrition and disease; on top of 13 years of sanctions, this means we are closing in on 18 years of US policy causing death and destruction for Iraqis. We need to speak up more than ever— "**US OUT OF THE 'MIDDLE EAST'**"!!!