

US accelerates preparations for invasion of Iraq

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4 January 2003

Tens of thousands of additional American troops are on their way to the Persian Gulf, as the Bush administration's buildup to war against Iraq accelerates. Reports from Washington suggest that the Pentagon will be in position to launch a full-scale war by the end of this month.

On January 1, US military officials announced that 17,000 soldiers in the Third Infantry Division are being sent from bases in Georgia to the Gulf. This will mark the first deployment of a full combat division in the region since the 1991 US war with Iraq. The Third Infantry is a mechanized unit with extensive desert training.

The division's second brigade is already in Kuwait as part of a previous troop rotation. The first and third brigades, as well as its aviation brigade, will begin moving in the next several weeks. Much of the unit's tanks and heavy equipment have already been sent to the Gulf by ship.

On January 2 the Pentagon revealed that several other specialized units had been given deployment orders, including 800 engineering, signals and intelligence specialists based in Germany, normally working in support of the First Infantry Division and the First Armored Division. These two divisions are expected to be dispatched to the Gulf along with the Third Infantry, but they require less time to reach the Gulf since they are based in Germany.

Another 300 air defense troops who operate Patriot anti-missile batteries are being sent from Ft. Bliss, Texas to the Gulf. Their equipment began to leave the fort January 3. They will join 900 soldiers from Patriot units already deployed in Kuwait, previously scheduled to rotate back to the US, but now ordered to remain in place. These smaller units will arrive in Kuwait by mid-February, the Army said.

Besides the three divisions already named, press accounts have identified the 101st Airborne Division,

based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and the First Marine Expeditionary Force, with 17,500 troops based at Camp Pendleton, California, as units to be deployed to the Persian Gulf in the coming month, according to an order signed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in late December.

The Navy moved to double its effective striking power in the region, instructing the battle group headed by the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln to stay in the western Pacific for three months, rather than returning home to Everett, Washington. The seven-ship flotilla finished a six-month tour in the Persian Gulf and spent Christmas at Perth, Australia.

The USS George Washington, which returned to Norfolk, Virginia before Christmas from the Mediterranean Sea, has been notified that it could return to service shortly rather than spend a normal six-month tour in port. The USS Constellation is currently in the Persian Gulf and the USS Harry S. Truman is in the Mediterranean. Dispatch of the George Washington and Abraham Lincoln would bring the number of aircraft carriers within striking distance of Iraq to four, equipped with more than 200 warplanes.

The Air Force is also building up its forces in the region, preparing to send 54 F-15C fighter jets based at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, 92 F-15E attack jets from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina, and B-1B bombers based in South Dakota, along with combat search-and-rescue units and personnel to operate unmanned Predator aerial surveillance drones.

The combined impact of these announced military moves—as well as others still kept secret—will be to at least double the nearly 60,000 US military personnel already in the Persian Gulf. The resulting total of 125,000 troops is more than the number required to begin combat operations against Iraq, Pentagon officials have told the media. Ultimately, an invasion of Iraq will likely involve

as many as 250,000 troops.

The huge US force will swamp the available facilities in Kuwait, where more than one quarter of the national territory has already been turned over to US military occupation. US troops will also be based in Qatar, Bahrain and Oman, and others will be stationed on board ship. US tanks and armored personnel carriers will be deployed in Kuwait while the personnel to operate them will remain just “over the horizon” until given orders to join their equipment and move north into Iraq.

An unknown number of the US soldiers will deploy in Saudi Arabia, despite the public reluctance of the ruling monarchy to allow the US to use Saudi bases for the war. The *New York Times* reported December 29, citing Pentagon sources, that Saudi officials have given private assurances that the US will be able to use the command center at Prince Sultan Air Base near Riyadh. US warplanes based in Saudi Arabia have been permitted to bomb targets in Iraq for the past two months, the Pentagon revealed.

While the visible military buildup is concentrated on Iraq’s southern flank, press reports from the Middle East indicate that a considerable number of US military and intelligence personnel are already operating in the north of the country, in the Kurdish region near the Turkish and Iranian borders. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times* December 29, the Pentagon’s war plans call for a combination of massive large-scale bombing and deep penetration by ground units in the first days of the conflict—a blitzkrieg approach that would require 70,000 to 100,000 troops. If this report is accurate, the Pentagon would have forces in place to launch such an attack by mid-January, weeks before the date previously suggested by Bush administration statements.

The military preparations are accompanied by increasingly bellicose statements from President Bush and other US government spokesmen. On January 3, Bush warned Iraqi President Saddam Hussein that his “day of reckoning” was coming. The next day Bush made a heavily-publicized visit to Ft. Hood, Texas, where he addressed thousands of uniformed soldiers about the impending war.

The US Army also announced it would conduct a war game in Germany later this month that will bring together most of the field commanders likely to be responsible for leading a war with Iraq. The exercise, titled “Victory Scrimmage,” will be carried out at the US army training center at Grafenwohr. It will be led by Lieutenant General William Wallace, who would head the ground

forces in an invasion of Iraq. The dress rehearsal, set to begin January 23, will bring together commanders of the German-based First Armored and First Infantry divisions and the US-based 101st Airborne and First Cavalry divisions.

The exercise is doubly provocative because it begins only four days before the January 27 deadline for Hans Blix, the head of the UN weapons inspections program, to file his first official report with the Security Council. Five weeks of inspections by more than 100 UN experts have failed to find a single substantial violation by Iraq of UN resolutions, or any evidence of weapons of mass destruction, confirming that the Bush administration’s focus on that issue is sheer pretext.

Iraq’s deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, discussed the real reasons for the US plans to invade his country in a meeting with European peace activists who traveled to Baghdad. He pointed to the lack of any substantiation for the US claims that Iraq is a threat to the world.

“When they continue their preparations for the war of aggression, what does that mean?” he asked. “It doesn’t mean that they are genuinely afraid of an imaginary Iraqi threat. It means that they have an imperialist design. That design is to invade Iraq, to occupy Iraq and use the national resources of Iraq for the purposes of ... the American capitalist regime.”

He continued: “When America becomes stronger economically, when America takes over the whole oil of the region and puts it in its hands, it is going to pressure politically and economically every country that needs oil.”

The American media continues to pretend that oil is not a significant factor in the US war drive. Functioning as a mouthpiece for the Bush administration, it is seeking to conceal from the American people the predatory motivation for the bloodbath that is about to be unleashed.



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