

US Air Force base authorizes deadly force against antiwar protesters

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Officials at Vandenberg Air Force Base in southern California announced March 14 they had authorized military police to use deadly force against activists who plan to trespass onto the base to protest the imminent war against Iraq.

The announcement came on the same day that a member of a group called Guadalupe Catholic Worker jumped onto the base's entrance sign and sprayed it with four ounces of his own blood in a symbolic antiwar gesture. Dennis Apel, 52, later pleaded guilty to misdemeanor counts of trespassing and vandalism. He will be sentenced next month in a Santa Barbara federal court and faces a possible jail sentence or fine.

Vandenberg officials said if protesters go ahead with plans to penetrate the base, military security police may shoot to kill. "This is not fun and games anymore," said Major Stacey Bako. "We're living in post 9/11. We don't know what's going to happen with the war effort in Iraq. These folks have got to realize their actions... They're illegal intruders."

Major Bako went on to justify the shoot-to-kill authorization on the grounds that the demonstrators could be "terrorists" planning on "killing everyone on base." She said military police will use their "judgment, experience and training" to determine if lethal force is necessary.

Peter Lumsdaine of the Vandenberg Action Coalition said the deadly force threat would not deter the protesters from attempting to gain access to the base.

The threat by the US military to use deadly forces against antiwar protesters must be taken as a serious warning of a general recourse by the Bush administration to violent repression in the face of the massive opposition that will inevitably accompany the onset of war.

It is indicative of the authoritarian outlook of the

extreme right-wing forces that hold power in Washington, whose anti-democratic inclinations are heightened by the isolation of the Bush administration internationally and the depth and breadth of popular opposition to the administration within the US. The crisis atmosphere that surrounds the launching of this war of aggression will tend to encourage those within the government who believe the best way to deal with democratic dissent at home is to employ violence and terror, just as they resort to bullying and military force to achieve their foreign policy aims.



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