

Spain extends military presence in Iraq

Keith Lee
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In breach of its repeated assurances that it would not do so, the Spanish Popular Party government recently announced it will contribute 1,100 soldiers to an 8,000-strong military force to be deployed in central Iraq by September. This brings to 2,000 the total number of Spanish troops in Iraq.

The force will be under the command of Polish General Andrzej Tyszkiewicz. Poland will be contributing 2,300 soldiers and Ukraine will send 1,100. Alongside these troops will be units from Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Lithuania. The Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* reported that three Latin American countries, El Salvador, Honduras and the Dominican Republic will provide a further 1,000 troops.

The 8,000 troops will serve in the Polish-controlled zone of Iraq, between the British and US sections. The zone will include cities such as Karbala and Nasiriyah. Spanish Defence Minister Federico Trillo said that overall command of the unit would be rotated “in some months’ time”.

The multinational force, under nominal Polish command, fulfils an important political role for the Bush administration. Poland is subordinate to the United States politically and dependent on it for financing the operation, but the establishment of a zone nominally under its control is aimed at creating the illusion that Iraq is not an American protectorate. US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld welcomed Spain’s decision to participate, stating, “We are very pleased that Spain has decided to send significant numbers of troops”, while NATO’s Secretary General Lord Robertson called it a “bold decision”.

The escalation of Spain’s military role contains political risks for the Spanish government. At home it has already faced huge opposition to the war with millions taking part in antiwar demonstrations. Now Spanish troops face the possibility of becoming

embroiled, in partnership with the US, in what is turning into a classical colonial-style war of repression. US forces have launched counterinsurgency operations to quell armed resistance and growing hostility from the Iraqi people.

Until now Spain’s military role has taken place under the pretence of “humanitarianism”, but this can no longer continue. Its troops in Iraq will now be used to protect very lucrative spoils of war and the government expects some form of payback.

US President George W. Bush recently announced that he would like Spain’s Izar shipyard to build eight submarines promised to Taiwan by America. Originally the order was to go to a German shipyard, but this has been put on hold. A former US military officer said, “Bush is going to do whatever he can for Aznar [Spain’s prime minister] to thank him for his support for the war in Iraq ... this [contract] could be seriously considered because of the relations between Spain and the US, this is obvious.”

Spain’s second largest oil group, Cepsa, has announced it will buy one million barrels of oil from Iraq which will take place under the terms of a contract signed by the Iraqi state oil marketing company, SOMO, and a consortium of European, Turkish and US firms.

The first Iraqi oil export contracts are set to be awarded some time this week and will be allocated on the basis of recommendations by SOMO. The contracts will be for 1 million-barrel lots. These will largely come from Iraq’s northern oilfields, but light oil will also come from Iraq’s southern oilfields.

While a spokesman for SOMO has said there would be no discrimination against firms who had refused to take part in the war against Iraq and that it “is a completely open bidding procedure”, it is the US which controls the organisation and which will ultimately decide who gets what.

Tim Carney, senior adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Industry and Minerals, has now decided to go back on his earlier pledge to leave any decision to privatise the oilfields to an elected Iraqi government. Plans are now in place to start privatisation as soon as a holding administration is in place.

Carney plans to privatise the first 100 state-owned firms within a year. "Privatisation is the right direction for the twenty-first century Iraq," he said.



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