

Debate on troop redeployment: saber-rattling from both Bush and Kerry

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The clash this week between President George W. Bush and his Democratic challenger John Kerry over the proposed redeployment of US troops stationed in Europe and Asia has only underscored the commitment of both major parties to a continued escalation of US militarism.

Bush presented his plan Monday in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. It calls for the withdrawal of between 60,000 and 70,000 American troops from bases located principally in Germany and South Korea and their restationing in the US.

Bush said that the present configuration of the US overseas deployment was outmoded, having been developed to counter the military power of a Soviet Union that no longer exists. He added that the US armed forces have become “more agile and more lethal...better able to strike anywhere in the world over great distances on short notice.”

In a bit of shameless pandering for military votes, Bush went on to claim that bringing the troops back to the US was meant to give military personnel and their spouses the ability to “spend more time with their families at home.”

Bush made clear in his speech that the redeployment scheme is not new. The plan, he noted, was part of a “comprehensive review of America’s global force posture” initiated in 2001.

This same review gave rise to the 2002 “National Security Strategy,” which proclaimed Washington’s intention to use its military power wherever and whenever it saw fit, against any country that it believed might pose a threat to US interests. This doctrine, popularly known as “preemptive war,” found concrete expression in the unprovoked US invasion of Iraq.

This policy is founded on the conception that Washington’s unchallenged military supremacy gives it a free hand to use force to assert the global hegemony of American capitalism. Concluding that the demise of the Soviet Union has rendered obsolete the previous strategy of “forward deployment” to counter potential military threats, Washington now openly asserts its intention to initiate the wars of the future.

The planned troop reductions in Western Europe, South Korea and other long-standing overseas garrisons are part of a plan to extend US military facilities into whole new regions of the world, particularly Central Asia. The US attack on Afghanistan cleared the way for a string of new bases in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, anchored in Washington’s close alliance with the police-state regime in Uzbekistan.

New bases have also been created throughout the Middle East and North Africa, while Washington expects to maintain a permanent military presence in occupied Iraq.

Taken together, these new facilities demonstrate the intention of American imperialism to impose a US military stranglehold over the vast oil and gas reserves of the Persian Gulf and the Caucasus, together with the shipping lanes and pipelines used to pump out these strategic resources to the world market.

Other facilities are being established in what Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has referred to as the “new Europe,” i.e., the pliant former Soviet bloc countries that have—in contrast to America’s traditional NATO allies—backed the US occupation of Iraq.

In all, the US now has over 700 foreign military bases spread out over 130 different countries.

Pentagon officials defended the redeployment plan as an escalation, rather than a diminution, of US military power. In particular, they insisted that the withdrawal of 12,500 of the 37,000 US troops stationed in South Korea would not blunt their belligerent attitude toward North Korea. Defense Department officials have stressed that US “warfighting capacity” in the Korean peninsula is stronger than ever, citing a greater reliance on precision-guided “smart bombs” and naval power.

The redeployment of troops from South Korea was, in any case, not news. It was announced back in June, when the order was given for 3,600 of these US soldiers to be rotated out to engage in combat duty in Iraq.

Two days after Bush’s speech, Democratic candidate Kerry appeared before the same audience to attack the

Republican president's position—largely from the right.

"The President's vaguely stated plan does not strengthen our hand in the war against terror," declared Kerry. "And in no way relieves the strain on our overextended military personnel. And this hastily announced plan raises more doubts about our intentions and our commitments than it provides real answers."

Kerry focused his criticism on the planned troop reduction in Korea, asking, "Why are we unilaterally withdrawing 12,000 troops from the Korean peninsula at the very time we are negotiating with North Korea—a country that really has nuclear weapons?...This is clearly the wrong signal to send at the wrong time."

Presumably, Kerry wants to send an even more bellicose signal, escalating the protracted confrontation with the Pyongyang regime, which the Bush administration has been compelled to place on the back burner because of the unfolding catastrophe in Iraq.

Kerry used the speech to tout his own proposals for increased US militarism abroad. His "plans to reshape and rebuild our American military so that it is ready to fight tomorrow's wars," Kerry told his VFW audience, include adding another 40,000 troops and doubling the size of the US Army Special Forces.

What Kerry left out of his speech was just as significant as what he included. The Democratic candidate failed to point out the obvious: the withdrawal of up to 70,000 troops from Europe and East Asia over the next decade will do nothing to bring an end to the US war in Iraq and bring home the 136,000 American soldiers who are killing and dying there. Rather, it is designed to facilitate this war, as well as future acts of US military aggression.

The reason for the omission is no less obvious: Kerry supports the continuation of this war.

The Democratic candidate's differences with the Bush plan are entirely tactical. As voiced by his aides and supporters, they boil down to concern that troop withdrawals will deepen tensions between Washington and traditional allies such as Germany and France, and doubts that closing old bases and opening new ones would be a cost-effective means of projecting US military power.

On the fundamental trajectory of US policy—the use of military aggression to secure imperialist and neo-colonialist objectives—there is no disagreement. Like the Republican administration, Kerry and his supporters continuously invoke a global and never-ending "war on terror" to justify Washington's criminal methods and predatory aims.

There is another—and ominous—issue raised by the decision to bring tens of thousands of US troops back to the United States. Under conditions of a mounting economic crisis, with the gulf dividing the financial oligarchy and the masses of

working people growing wider, the question is posed: are these forces being garrisoned on American soil for possible use in quelling domestic unrest?

American capitalism has no viable way out of its systemic social and economic crisis. Whether Bush or Kerry is elected in November, it will continue on a course of violence abroad and intensified repression at home. The economic burden of US militarism alone is unsustainable, with both candidates committed to increasing the present \$500 billion in annual military spending. As social tensions continue to intensify, democratic forms of rule will prove increasingly untenable.

There have already been warnings in Washington—including from the former US Middle East commander General Tommy Franks—that another terrorist attack in the United States could lead to the calling off of elections and the imposition of martial law.

The dispute over the redeployment plan has once again exposed the lie that a vote for Kerry is a vote against war and repression. Casting a ballot for the Democratic candidate is not a means of opposing US militarism, but of continuing it.

The Socialist Equality Party is running in the 2004 election on a program that calls for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, the entire Middle East and Central Asia. Our party advocates the dismantling of the Pentagon war machine and the closing down of all the hundreds of US military bases worldwide. The vast resources squandered upon US weapons of mass destruction must be diverted to productive use, providing jobs, social services and improved living standards for working people.

Washington's imperialist foreign policy must be replaced by a policy of peaceful and fraternal collaboration between the working masses throughout the world.

If you support these goals, join our campaign and fight to make this program as widely known as possible. Reject the cowardly politics of those who promote Kerry as an alternative to the Bush administration by concealing the right-wing program upon which the Democrats are running.

We aim to use the coming election to initiate the struggle for a new political movement, based upon the masses of working people and armed with a socialist and internationalist program. Only such a movement, independent of the two-party system and fighting for the revolutionary transformation of society, can put an end to war and the threat of dictatorship.



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