Pentagon concludes US defeated in key Iraqi province

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A series of Pentagon and other government documents either released or leaked in the last week have underscored the deepening debacle confronting the US occupation of Iraq.

The most startling among them is a classified report drafted by the US Marine Corps' chief intelligence officer in Iraq concluding that the US has already lost in its effort to suppress the resistance in the country's restive Anbar province.

According to a *Washington Post* account of the secret document, the intelligence officer, Col. Pete Devlin, concluded that "there is almost nothing the US military can do to improve the political and social situation there."

The newspaper quoted an Army officer familiar with the report, which was dated August 16, as saying, "We haven't been defeated militarily, but we have been defeated politically—and that's where wars are won and lost." The *Post* article continued, "Another person familiar with the report said it describes Anbar as beyond repair; a third said it concludes that the United States has lost in Anbar."

The newspaper noted that the tone of the report was particularly significant given the upbeat "can-do" attitude generally taken by the military in Iraq, in contrast to the CIA, which has issued similarly dire assessments of the situation.

The predominantly Sunni Anbar province, Iraq's largest, borders Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The western province has been the scene of some of the largest and bloodiest offensives carried out by the US military, which has some 30,000 troops deployed there. These include the bloody siege of Fallujah in November 2004, in which thousands were killed and the city largely reduced to rubble.

US Marine and Army units have been engaged in unending combat in the provincial capital of Ramadi, a city of some 400,000, which has seen the most intense resistance of any area in the country to the US occupation, often accounting for half or more of all attacks by the Iraqi resistance.

The leaking of Devlin's report undoubtedly expresses mounting dissension within the upper echelons of the US military command over Washington's policy in Iraq. Its timing—in the midst of the Bush administration's pre-election attempts to cast the Iraqi occupation as the center of the "war on terrorism"—could not have been more devastating.

In response, the administration ordered the top US general in Anbar province to deliver an unusual telephone press briefing from the Marine base in Fallujah, with the apparent aim of refuting the intelligence estimate.

Maj. Gen. Richard Zilmer, however, seemed unwilling to perform to the White House's specifications. He told reporters, "I have seen that report and I do concur with that assessment," adding only that the document "was not intended to address the positive effects" achieved by occupation forces in the region.

He said that US forces in the province were capable of "stifling" the Iraqi resistance, but not defeating it. This "stifling" apparently refers to operations like Fallujah and other US offensives in the Euphrates River valley, which have only served to push resistance fighters from one area to another, while at the same time intensifying popular hostility to the American occupation and swelling the ranks of the resistance.

Zilmer, who acknowledged that those the US is fighting are overwhelmingly Iraqis and not so-called "foreign fighters," added that even pouring more American troops into the region would only "provide a temporary solution," and could not substitute for political and economic progress, which Washington has proven woefully unable to engender.

The furor generated by the Marine intelligence report came on the heels of another damning—though unclassified—document issued September 11 by the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of the US Congress.

The GAO report, which is based largely upon studies by other agencies, many of them previously unpublicized, points to a steady increase in armed acts of resistance against the US occupation. It found, "Total attacks reported from January 2006 through July 2006 were about 57 percent higher than the total reported during the same period in 2005."

A graph accompanying the document indicated that the number of attacks has risen from about 100 in May 2003 to 4,500 in July 2006.

While noting the ominous increase in "sectarian strife," the report stated that there have been "significant increases in attacks against coalition forces, who remain the primary targets."

The GAO findings directly contradict the Bush administration's thesis that the forward march of "democracy"—supposedly expressed in the holding of national elections—would diminish the bloodletting in Iraq. On the contrary, the report cited findings by the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) that "the December 2005 elections appeared to heighten sectarian tensions and polarize sectarian divides." It also cited a report by the US Institute of Peace, a government agency, which found that "the focus on ethnic and sectarian identity has sharpened as a result of

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Iraq's political process, while nationalism and a sense of Iraqi identity have weakened."

The GAO report also referred to a study by the director of national intelligence acknowledging that despite attempts by the Pentagon to "stand up" an Iraqi military, "many elements of the Iraqi security forces are loyal to sectarian and party interests." It cited as well a Pentagon report which found that police and military units were organized along ethnic and regional lines, with senior officers commanding "only soldiers of their own sectarian or regional background."

The report also pointed to the economic debacle created by the US war and occupation in Iraq. It cited last month's figures showing that Iraq was producing only 2.17 million barrels of oil per day, well below the pre-war level of 2.6 million barrels.

During the same period, it found electricity availability averaged only "5.9 hours per day in Baghdad and 10.7 hours nationwide"—conditions that make normal economic life literally impossible.

The result has been a catastrophic decline in living standards for the masses of Iraqi working people. The inflation rate is expected to double this year, reaching a punishing 70 percent. Fuel and electricity prices, meanwhile, have risen by 270 percent in just the last year.

The GAO report describes the Iraqi resistance as "strong and resilient," declaring that "insurgents continue to demonstrate the ability to recruit new fighters, supply themselves, and attack coalition and Iraqi security forces." It adds, "The deteriorating conditions threaten continued progress in US and other international efforts to assist Iraq in the political and economic areas."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon's Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization reported that the number of roadside bomb explosions—which have claimed the largest share of the 2,600 US troops killed in Iraq—rose to 1,200 in August, four times as many as in January 2004.

Washington is spending an average of $10 billion a month on the Iraqi adventure, with the US Senate agreeing last week to appropriate $63 billion more for military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

A further indication of the worsening fiasco in Iraq came with the report Wednesday that Iraqi security forces had discovered the bodies of 65 victims of execution-style slayings in and around Baghdad. All of the bodies were bound and bore signs of torture, and some were beheaded. The grisly discovery indicated that death squads are operating with impunity in the Iraqi capital, even after the US poured thousands of troops into the city in a much-publicized "security crackdown" that was supposed to pacify Baghdad.

Washington had previously claimed that the beefed-up deployment had succeeded in cutting the number of deaths from sectarian violence in Baghdad by 52 percent from July to August. It was revealed last week, however, that this supposed "success story" was in reality only the result of false accounting by the Pentagon.

Without disclosing it to anyone, US officials had excluded the hundreds killed in car bomb and mortar attacks from its death toll. This macabre form of accounting fraud is a telling measure of the increasing desperation of US occupation authorities.

The Iraqi Health Ministry helped correct the phony image manufactured by the Pentagon. It reported that the number of Baghdad residents suffering violent deaths last month had hit 1,536.

This intensifying disaster wrought by the US war and occupation has led to heated recriminations within American ruling circles, with the US midterm elections less than two months away.

The Bush administration has launched a sustained propaganda offensive attempting to portray the war in Iraq as a struggle to prevent terrorist attacks against the US itself, while smearing all those opposing the war as accomplices of Al Qaeda. The Democratic Party has responded by charging the Republican White House with having bungled the war, whose aims enjoyed broad support within the US financial elite.

Increasingly, the Democratic campaign has centered on the charge that the debacle in Iraq is weakening the US military and preventing its effective use in other, more pressing wars and future American interventions.

Last Saturday, the Democrats' 2004 presidential candidate, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, delivered a speech denouncing the Bush administration for a "stand-still-and-lose strategy" and demanding that it send another 5,000 troops to Afghanistan to suppress mounting opposition to the US occupation in that country.

Kerry went on to call for the "redeployment" of US troops presently occupying Iraq, making it clear that Washington's attempt to subjugate the oil-rich country should not be ended, but merely reorganized along more rational lines. The occupation would continue, according to Kerry's proposal, with a "residual force to complete the training" of Iraqi security forces and "deter foreign intervention." In other words, tens of thousands of American troops would remain to secure US domination of Iraq.

Former US President Bill Clinton sounded a similar note in a speech to a Jewish charity last week, declaring, "We need more troops." He added, "We can't practice hit-and-run democracy."

The *New York Times* Wednesday quoted Democratic political strategist Jim Jordan as saying that, in the 2006 midterm elections, "it's better for the party if we are defining ourselves as muscular and ready to defend the country."

Underlying this electoral strategy is the commitment of both major parties to continued global militarism aimed at imposing US economic and political hegemony. In its search for "muscularity" and its call for "more troops," the Democrats are positioning themselves to be the party that brings back the draft and launches American imperialism into new and even more terrible wars.

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