

Pentagon report paints grim picture for US in Iraq

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A report issued by the Pentagon Monday confirms the disastrous state of the American project for the conquest of Iraq and transformation of the oil-rich country into a semi-colony of the United States.

The armed resistance to the US occupation continues to swell, with both insurgent attacks on US forces and American casualties growing at a double-digit rate. According to the quarterly report, mandated by Congress, the number of attacks carried out by insurgents has risen by 22 percent over the past three months, while US casualties have risen 32 percent.

More than two thirds of the attacks are directed against American soldiers and Iraqi soldiers and police. The remaining one third of the attacks target Iraqi civilians. Thus, despite the efforts by the Bush administration and the media to portray the violence as largely internecine sectarian warfare between Sunnis and Shia, the bulk of the armed actions have been directed against the occupation forces and their Iraqi underlings.

The number of attacks has doubled over the past year, belying all of the Bush administration's claims of progress towards establishing a stable occupation regime. The rate of armed attacks rose from 463 a week during the six months from February to August 2005 to 959 a week during the four months from August to November of this year. US casualties are being recorded at the rate of 25 soldiers a day killed or wounded, with an even higher rate, 33 casualties a day, among Iraqi soldiers and policemen.

Marine Lt. Gen. John F. Sattler, director of strategic plans and policy for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, briefed the press on the report. "The violence has escalated at an unbelievably rapid pace," he said. Pentagon officials told the press that insurgents had achieved "partial strategic success" by splitting the US-established government in Baghdad along sectarian lines and undermining its viability.

While the report suggested that the US forces were meeting their goal in the number of Iraqi soldiers and policemen given rudimentary military training, reaching a total of 325,000, some 45,000 of these have already been

killed, wounded or gone missing, while as many as 50 percent would desert if deployed outside their home areas, according to US estimates.

The nearly four-year US occupation of Iraq has been a catastrophe for the Iraqi people, who face social and economic conditions far worse than those which prevailed under Saddam Hussein, and a level of mass killing that outstrips the bloodiest years of the Baathist regime.

The war has also had a profound impact on the American military, as testimony by Pentagon officials last week emphasized. Lt. Gen. Peter Schoomaker, the Army chief of staff, told a congressional panel December 14 that the stresses of the long-term deployment of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with restrictions on the use of Reserve and National Guard troops, was having a devastating effect on military readiness.

"The Army is incapable of generating and sustaining the required forces to wage the global war on terror," Schoomaker said, "without its components—active, Guard and reserve—surging together." There were not enough active-duty soldiers to meet the requirements of continual deployments, he said, since current Pentagon policy bars second deployments for members of the reserves and National Guard, except on a volunteer basis. "At this pace, without recurrent access to the reserve components, through remobilization, we will break the active component," the general said.

The Bush administration imposed the informal ban on second deployments—which goes beyond current legal requirements—because of concerns over the political fallout from increased casualties among Guard and Reserve soldiers, who tend to be older, married and with children. These forces were heavily used in the first three years of the war, to the point that only 90,000 of the 522,000 Guard and Reserve soldiers are eligible for mobilization to the war zones.

According to an Army summary distributed to the press, reserve forces now must be cobbled together from soldiers in many different units, drawing an average of 62 percent of

their strength from such recruitment, compared to only 6 percent in 2002. In one transportation company, only seven of 170 soldiers were eligible to deploy, and the others came from 65 other units in 49 locations. "Military necessity dictates that we deploy organized, trained, equipped cohesive units," Schoomaker said, "and you don't do that by pick-up teams."

Such considerations underlie the resistance of the Pentagon brass to the White House's preferred initiative: a "surge" of 20,000 to 30,000 additional combat troops, who would be dispatched to Baghdad and Anbar Province, center of the Sunni armed resistance, to conduct a military blitz against the local populations.

According to a report Tuesday in the *Washington Post*, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have expressed unanimous opposition to the "surge" proposal, on the grounds that its long-term consequences have not been thought through, particularly the impact it will have in inflaming the Iraqi resistance in both Sunni and Shiite areas.

There is also grave concern among the top officers of the impact on morale among the troops, since the most ambitious "surge" proposals—reportedly favored by Vice President Cheney—would require redeploying troops currently scheduled to go home from Iraq and sending them back into combat instead.

Such views were voiced most clearly by Bush's former secretary of state, Colin Powell, who was also the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the administration of the senior Bush, in which capacity he oversaw military operations in the first US war against Iraq. In an appearance on the CBS program "Face the Nation" on Sunday, Powell declared his opposition to any short-term increase in US military forces in Iraq.

"Before I would add any additional troops or recommend it to a commander in chief, I'd want to make sure we have a clear understanding of what it is they're going for, how long they're going for," he said.

Bush, Cheney and their closest aides refuse to acknowledge the scale of the debacle in Iraq and have declared themselves irrevocably committed to an American military victory. Bush's newly appointed secretary of defense, former CIA director Robert Gates, reiterated this position in his remarks Monday, as he took over control of the Pentagon from Donald Rumsfeld.

"Failure in Iraq at this juncture would be a calamity that would haunt our nation, impair our credibility, and endanger Americans for decades to come," he declared as he was sworn in by Vice President Cheney, with the incoming chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Democrat Carl Levin of Michigan, in attendance as well. Levin, along with the rest of the Democrats in the Senate,

voted to confirm Gates as the new Pentagon chief. He told the *Washington Post* that Gates "will be much more open to oversight" by Congress than Rumsfeld was.

There are no congressional Democratic leaders who would disagree with Gates's declaration that defeat in Iraq would be a disaster for American imperialism with global repercussions. That is why, despite the powerful antiwar sentiments expressed by a majority of voters in the November 7 election, the new Democratic majority in Congress is committed to continuing the war.

The conflicts within the ruling elite revolve around how to salvage as much as possible from the debacle in Iraq, but all factions endorse the fundamental goals of the Bush administration's policy, which are to seize control of the oil resources of Iraq and use that country's territory as a strategic base for projecting American power throughout the Middle East.

This bipartisan agreement was underscored in a commentary published in the *Wall Street Journal* Monday, co-authored by Senator Hillary Clinton, the early frontrunner for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, and Republican Senator John Ensign of Nevada. The two senators called for quick action by the Iraqi government to create an "Iraq Oil Trust" that would issue shares of stock to every Iraqi citizen.

This plan would open the way to the privatization of the oil industry. Such schemes have been employed in other countries as a transition to selling off state-run industries to corporate investors who buy up the individual shares, preying on the economic desperation of a population largely without jobs and facing destitution.

Clinton has also introduced a bill called the United States Army Relief Act that calls for an increase in the size of the Army by 80,000 troops over the next four years. Her co-sponsors include Democratic senators Jack Reed, Joseph Lieberman and Bill Nelson. Under Rumsfeld, the Pentagon regularly rebuffed such proposals by the Democrats, but on Tuesday Bush said he was now willing to support increases in the authorized strength of both the Army and the Marine Corps.



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