

More US troops to Kuwait, as Bush moves to escalate the war in Iraq

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The Pentagon announced December 27 that it will send 3,500 additional US soldiers to Kuwait in January, a clear step toward the increase in American combat troops and escalation of the war in Iraq that President Bush is expected to announce early in the new year.

On Thursday, Bush met with top administration officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine Corps General Peter Pace, to discuss preparations for a renewed military offensive.

The *New York Times* reported on Friday that a “surge” of between 17,000 and 20,000 troops was discussed, to be achieved by moving into Iraq the new troops in Kuwait, delaying the departure of two Marine regiments, and speeding up the deployment of several Army brigades.

The troops would be used to “clear neighborhoods and to conduct other operations to regain control of the capital,” the *Times* reported, citing Pentagon officials.

This can only mean a vast increase in violence and killing, intended to reassert American control of areas in the capital where mass opposition to the US occupation is concentrated. This “clearing” operation will likely be focused on the impoverished Shia slum of Sadr City, which is controlled by militias associated with the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

On December 27, Sahib al-Amiri, a top aide to Sadr, was killed by US troops in Najaf in an operation that bears all the hallmarks of a targeted assassination. After fleeing to the roof of his home, Amiri was shot four times, once in the head, by American soldiers.

The move was likely intended to scuttle negotiations between Sadr and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki for the return of Sadr loyalists to active participation in the Maliki government. Allies of Sadr withdrew from the

government last month to protest Maliki’s decision to meet with President Bush in Jordan.

While an increase in troop strength in Iraq is being billed as a “temporary surge,” what is being planned is a long-term operation. This was made clear by two of the figures most closely associated with the plan, Frederick Kagan of the right-wing American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and retired general Jack Keane. The two co-authored an AEI report issued earlier this month that calls for an increase of at least 30,000 US combat troops and a massive escalation of military violence aimed at exterminating the anti-American resistance. Keane was among the military experts who met with Bush this month to discuss options for increasing troops.

In an opinion piece published in the *Washington Post* on December 27, Kagan and Keane argued that “bringing security to Baghdad . . . is possible only with a surge of at least 30,000 combat troops lasting 18 months or so.” What is needed, they wrote, is a “traditional counterinsurgency mission” which would reverse “a history of half-measures.” They added, “The only ‘surge’ option that makes sense is both long and large.”

An estimated 655,000 Iraqis have been killed as a result of the American invasion and occupation, and Iraqi society has been devastated. But this, according to Keane and Kagan, is the product of “half-measures.”

In planning the military escalation, Bush is able to count on the support of the Democratic Party. Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman, a strident advocate of a major troop increase, wrote an opinion piece published in the *New York Times* Friday entitled “Why We Need More Troops in Iraq.”

Lieberman declared that “failure in Iraq would be a strategic and moral catastrophe.” He argued that the

crisis of the occupation “is the predictable consequence of the failure to ensure basic security and, equally important, of a conscious strategy by al-Qaeda and Iran, which have systematically aimed to undermine Iraq’s fragile political center.”

The phrase “failure to ensure basic security” is coded language for not deploying from the outset a sufficient number of troops to drown Iraqi opposition to the occupation in blood. This is a criticism that has been frequently raised by Democratic leaders against the Bush administration and his ousted defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld.

Lieberman’s emphasis on the role of Iran reflects the aim within sections of the political establishment, including the Bush administration, to combine an increase in troop strength in Iraq with an escalation of military preparations against Iran.

Other leading Democrats, including Senator Hillary Clinton and incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, have indicated they will support such an increase as long as it can be sold as a first step toward eventually drawing down US forces in the future.

A few leading Democrats have come out in opposition to an increase of troops, most prominently the incoming chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Joseph Biden. On Tuesday, Biden declared that an increase in troops was “the absolute wrong strategy,” while making clear his general support for the Iraq occupation. Biden’s position reflects concern within sections of the military and political establishment that an increase in the number of US troops in Iraq will only intensify the crisis of the occupation and increase opposition to the war both in Iraq and the United States.

The Democrats have already rejected any measures that could force the administration to begin drawing down troops, including a cut-off of funding for the war. Biden repeated this position on Tuesday, arguing that “there’s nothing the United States Congress can do by a piece of legislation to alter the conduct of a war that a president decides to pursue.”

Sections of the military brass have resisted a “surge” out of concern for the enormous strains that have been placed on the American military. Earlier this month, the Bush administration announced that it would support a permanent increase in the size of the military in order to address this problem, a proposal that has been

championed by the Democratic Party.

The move to escalate repression in Iraq is part of a broader policy of intensifying militarist violence throughout the world. Recent days have seen stepped up provocations against Iran as well as the launching of a proxy war in Somalia that has the potential of evolving into a regional conflict throughout North Africa.

The Bush administration, with the open support of sections of the Democratic Party and the acquiescence of the rest, is—in the name of “democracy”—directly flouting the will of the American people, who are massively opposed to the war in Iraq. The utter fraud of the government’s democratic pretensions abroad is demonstrated by its contempt for democratic public opinion at home.

Recent polls show that the option of sending more troops to Iraq is supported by only 11 percent of the population, while a clear majority supports a withdrawal of US forces.

The mid-term elections in November, which ended Republican control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, were a popular repudiation of the Bush administration and the Iraq war. It is clear, however, that elections will not bring an end to the war or the policies of neo-colonialism and militarism of which it is a part so long as political life in the US continues to be monopolized by two parties of the US corporate-financial elite.



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