

# Bush purges Iraq command to prepare military escalation

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The Bush administration is making sweeping personnel changes in the top leadership of the US military, intelligence and diplomatic establishment in preparation for a major escalation of the war in Iraq.

On Friday, the White House announced it was removing both Gen. George Casey, the senior commander in Iraq, and Gen. John Abizaid, the head of Central Command, which has overall responsibility for US forces in the region.

Both of the Army generals had repeatedly expressed reservations about the plan—to be announced next week by Bush—to carry out a “surge” of tens of thousands of additional troops in an effort to break Iraqi resistance to US occupation and domination.

Casey is to be replaced by Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, who served two tours in Iraq, first as commander of the 101st Airborne Division and then as the officer in charge of efforts to train Iraqi security forces. In his latest assignment, Petraeus has headed the Combined Armed Center in Leavenworth, Kansas, the Army’s main training center for senior officers. There he oversaw the drafting of a new field manual on counterinsurgency operations.

Petraeus has reportedly expressed support for an escalation of the US military presence in Iraq, and the field manual that he issued calls for redeploying troops from secure bases to population centers—a tactic that will inevitably lead to a major increase in casualties among both Iraqi civilians and American soldiers.

Replacing Abizaid is Admiral William Fallon, the US commander in the Pacific. The appointment of Fallon, a senior naval officer, is widely viewed as an indication that the administration intends to accelerate its preparations for a military attack on Iran, in which the Navy’s cruise missiles and aircraft carrier-based warplanes are expected to play a central role.

The administration is also said to be planning the replacement of Zalmay Khalilzad as US ambassador to Iraq, bringing in Ryan Crocker, an Arabic-speaking State Department veteran who is currently Washington’s ambassador to Pakistan. Khalilzad has apparently fallen out of favor with those seeking a military escalation, in part because of his support for talks with Iran. He is being sent to replace John Bolton as

ambassador to the United Nations.

John Negroponte is being shifted from his post as director of national intelligence to the number-two spot at the State Department, with retired Navy admiral John McConnel, a former director of the National Security Agency, being brought in to replace him.

McConnel’s appointment will place all of the major US spy agencies—the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency—under the leadership of military figures. The Pentagon controls 80 percent of Washington’s estimated \$42 billion intelligence budget and has vastly expanded its own intelligence operations.

Citing widespread misgivings over the increasing domination of these agencies by the military, the *Wall Street Journal* Friday quoted former State Department and CIA counterterrorism chief Larry Johnson as saying, “With so many military guys involved, you run the risk of the intelligence agencies giving the consumers what they want to hear. The result could be a focus on supporting wars, rather than longer-term analysis.”

Amid this wholesale reshuffling of key personnel, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the right-wing think tank that played a pivotal role in the ideological preparation of the war in Iraq, held a conference Friday to present a detailed draft of a proposal for the escalation that the White House has apparently embraced.

The authors of the report, Frederick Kagan of the AEI and retired Gen. Jack Keane, advocate a prolonged deployment of more than 30,000 additional US troops in what they term “A Plan for Success in Iraq.” The plan calls for pouring these troops primarily into Baghdad, with other units dispatched to Anbar Province, in order to “secure the Iraqi population,” a euphemism for crushing popular resistance.

It also calls for US forces to “clear high-violence Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods” and for American troops to “remain behind to maintain security.”

Speaking in favor of the plan at the AEI forum were senators John McCain of Arizona, a leading contender for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, and Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut. The latter held onto his seat by running as an independent, with the support of the Bush administration, after being defeated in last year’s Democratic primary by a

challenger who criticized his slavish support for the administration's policies in Iraq.

"The surge must be substantial and it must be sustained," declared McCain. He added, "I want to be clear—and I mean this with all sincerity—[this] strategy will mean more casualties and extra hardships for our brave fighting men and women, and the violence may get worse before it gets better. We have to be prepared for this."

For his part, Lieberman called for bipartisan support for the escalation in Iraq, while repeatedly claiming that the US occupation was part of a global war against an "axis of evil" that includes Iran.

Lieberman went on to praise Bush: "The president of the United States gets this. I think he sees the moment that we are at in the larger war on terrorism and the significance of how we conclude the war in Iraq; how devastating it would be to the Iraqis, to the Middle East, to America if we simply withdrew."

He added, "The worst thing that could happen here is that there be some kind of attempt to resolve this pivotal moment where they compromise among factions in American politics and in the American Congress rather than doing what is right and has the highest prospect of succeeding in Iraq."

In other words, the "worst thing that could happen" would be to bow to the overwhelming demand of the American people, expressed at the polls in November, for a withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and an end to the criminal war launched by the Bush administration nearly four years ago.

Not only are these sentiments shared by a clear majority of the population at large, but they have become rife within the military itself, even as its members are being told that they must accept "more casualties and extra hardships."

A poll conducted by *Military Times*, the publisher of newspapers for the armed forces, found only 35 percent of those responding supporting Bush's war policy, with 42 percent opposed. It found that the percentage expressing optimism about the US war had fallen from 83 percent in 2004 to 50 percent in 2006. And just 41 percent of the military expressed the opinion that the US was right to have launched the war in the first place.

There is no indication that any concession to the popular will or democratic processes is contemplated by the White House. Nor is there any sign that the Bush administration will be swayed by the plunging morale within the military and the likelihood of a drastic increase in casualties, under conditions in which hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and over 3,000 American troops have already died.

White House spokesman Tony Snow said of the televised speech that Bush is expected to deliver on Iraq policy next Wednesday, "You know what the theme is? Victory. Winning."

Bush himself on Thursday told reporters, "One thing is certain. I will want to make sure the mission is clear and specific and can be accomplished." The language echoed demands by military commanders who voiced skepticism about

increasing the number of US troops in Iraq without a specific objective.

The day after the Democrats assumed the leadership of Congress, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi issued a joint letter to Bush opposing the "surge" in US forces.

"Adding more combat troops will only endanger more Americans and stretch our military to the breaking point for no strategic gain," the Democratic leaders wrote. "Rather than deploy additional forces to Iraq, we believe the way forward is to begin the phased redeployment of our forces in the next four to six months, while shifting the principal mission of our forces there from combat to training, logistics, force protection and counter-terror."

The Democratic "redeployment" plan calls for the continued occupation of Iraq by tens of thousands of US troops for the foreseeable future.

Reid last month expressed conditional support for the proposed "surge," declaring in a television news interview, "If the commanders on the ground said this was just for a short period of time, we'll go along with that."

The Democratic leadership has repeatedly indicated that it is not willing to utilize the one means it has to prevent an escalation of war—the blocking of funding for the operation.

Determined to intensify the bloodletting in Iraq in order to defend the strategic interests of American capitalism in the oil-rich Persian Gulf and internationally, the US ruling elite and both of its political parties are on a collision course with the overwhelmingly antiwar sentiment of the American people.

The repudiation of the November elections and the preparations for a massive military escalation demonstrate that the war cannot be ended through the parties and institutions of the US corporate and political establishment. The struggle against war must be developed as a mass independent movement of the working people and youth against the two-party system and the financial elite whose interests it serves.



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