

Pentagon to deploy 20,000 troops on domestic “anti-terror” mission

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The Pentagon has begun to implement plans for the mobilization of 20,000 regular Army troops in anti-terror operations alongside state and local forces, a dramatic change in US military operations within the borders of the United States.

Some 4,700 troops, a full combat brigade based at Ft. Stewart, Georgia, were made available to the US Northern Command on October 1. The remaining troops will be assigned to the Northern Command as they complete assignments in Iraq or Afghanistan and are redeployed home by 2011.

The October 1 deployment was reported in the *Army Times* newspaper but not otherwise noted in the national media. The larger mobilization for 2011 was reported on the front page of the *Washington Post* Monday morning, an indication that the Pentagon seeks wider publicity about the move in order to accustom the American public to the sight of uniformed troops in the streets.

The pretext for the increased militarization of American society is, as always, the danger of terrorism, and in this case, a "nuclear terrorist attack," although the *Post* added that some "other domestic catastrophe" could be the trigger for military action. While the article suggests that this means a natural disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina, there is no doubt that the social and economic consequences of the meltdown in financial markets could well qualify as a "domestic catastrophe" requiring military intervention.

The Bush administration has worked for years to undermine the Posse Comitatus Act, a federal law dating back to the post-Civil War Reconstruction period, barring the use of regular military forces for domestic policing duties. The only exceptions to this longstanding ban have been the use of the National

Guard during natural disasters, and the deployment of federal troops during the ghetto riots of the 1960s.

Paul McHale, assistant defense secretary for homeland defense, said the use of 20,000 troops in a domestic deployment "would have been extraordinary to the point of unbelievable" before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, according to the text of a speech given to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, quoted by the *Post*. He described the new policy as "a fundamental change in military culture."

Two additional brigades will be assigned to create a total of three response teams to address what the military calls a CBRNE event, for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or high-yield explosives. The teams are known in Pentagon jargon as CBRNE Consequence Management Response Forces, or CCMRF. Another 6,000 troops would be drawn from specialized groups of National Guard and reserve troops trained to respond to a CBRNE event.

A combat post training exercise involving elements of three brigades was held September 8-19, 2008. The forces represented in Operation Vibrant Response included the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 3rd Infantry Division, the unit at Ft. Stewart; the 1st Medical Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas; and the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade, Fort Bragg, N.C.

McHale told the *Post* that the armed units would still be subject to the Posse Comitatus Act and would not engage in security duties except those relating directly to the CBRNE event or to protecting themselves while so engaged.

According to the *Post* account, Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England signed a directive in late 2007 providing \$556 million over five years to fund the program. The Pentagon began a pilot project last month

funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, in which civilian officials in five states—Hawaii, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Washington and West Virginia—would use military planners to help them develop disaster response plans.

When the Ft. Stewart unit was assigned to the Northern Command on October 1, the *Army Times* reported the event as "the first time an active unit has been given a dedicated assignment to NorthCom, a joint command established in 2002 to provide command and control for federal homeland defense efforts and coordinate defense support of civil authorities." The unit returned from duty in Afghanistan last spring.

According to the *Army Times*, the troops would "learn new skills [and] use some of the ones they acquired in the war zone.... They may be called upon to help with civil unrest and crowd control or to deal with potentially horrific scenarios such as massive poisoning and chaos in response to a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or high-yield explosive, or CBRNE, attack...."

The unit's commander, Col. Roger Cloutier, was quoted as follows: "It's a new modular package of nonlethal capabilities that they're fielding. They've been using pieces of it in Iraq, but this is the first time that these modules were consolidated and this package fielded, and because of this mission we're undertaking we were the first to get it."

The package includes equipment to stand up a roadblock; spike strips for slowing, stopping or controlling traffic; shields and batons; and beanbag bullets. It also includes the use of Tasers.

The deployment to NorthCom was made possible by the 2006 Defense Authorization Act, whose Section 1076 empowered President Bush to impose martial law in the event of a threat to "public order," regardless of its cause—i.e., potentially one produced by domestic political or social upheaval, not a terrorist attack.

That provision was drafted by the Republican chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, John Warner of Virginia, and the leading Democrat on the panel, Carl Levin of Michigan. According to one press account, the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act limited the power to declare martial law, but Bush issued a signing statement suggesting he did not accept

those restrictions.

Both Democratic and Republican governors objected to Section 1076 as an unneeded expansion of presidential authority to federalize the National Guard and usurp the powers of state officials, according to a letter jointly signed by Governor Michael Easley of North Carolina, a Democrat, and Governor Mark Sanford of South Carolina, a Republican, in 2007.



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