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Pentagon devising scenarios for martial law in US

By Patrick Martin – World Socialist Web Site

According to a report published Monday by the *Washington Post*, the Pentagon has developed its first ever war plans for operations within the continental United States, in which terrorist attacks would be used as the justification for imposing martial law on cities, regions or the entire country.

The front-page article cites sources working at the headquarters of the military's Northern Command (Northcom), located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The plans themselves are classified, but "officers who drafted the plans" gave details to *Post* reporter Bradley Graham, who was recently given a tour of Northcom headquarters at Peterson Air Force Base. The article thus appears to be a deliberate leak conducted for the purpose of accustoming the American population to the prospect of military rule.

According to Graham, "the new plans provide for what several senior officers acknowledged is the likelihood that the military will have to take charge in some situations, especially when dealing with mass-casualty attacks that could quickly overwhelm civilian resources."

The *Post* account declares, "The war plans represent a historic shift for the Pentagon, which has been reluctant to become involved in domestic operations and is legally constrained from engaging in law enforcement."

A total of 15 potential crisis scenarios are outlined, ranging from "low-end," which Graham describes as "relatively modest crowd-control missions," to "high-end," after as many as three simultaneous catastrophic mass-casualty events, such as a nuclear, biological or chemical weapons attack.

In each case, the military would deploy a quick-reaction force of as many as 3,000 troops per attack—i.e., 9,000 total in the worst-case scenario. More troops could be made available as needed.

The *Post* quotes a statement by Admiral Timothy J. Keating, head of Northcom: "In my estimation, [in the event of] a biological, a chemical or nuclear attack in any of the 50 states, the Department of Defense is best positioned—of the various eight federal agencies that would be involved—to take the lead."

The newspaper describes an unresolved debate among the military planners on how to integrate the new domestic mission with ongoing US deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan and other foreign conflicts. One major document of over 1,000 pages, designated CONPLAN 2002, provides a general overview of air, sea and land operations in both a post-attack situation and for "prevention and deterrence actions aimed at intercepting threats before they reach the United States." A second document, CONPLAN 0500, details the 15 scenarios and the actions associated with them.

The *Post* reports: "CONPLAN 2002 has passed a review by the Pentagon's Joint Staff and is due to go soon to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and top aides for further study and approval, the officers said. CONPLAN 0500 is still undergoing final drafting" at Northcom headquarters.

While Northcom was established only in October 2002, its headquarters staff of 640 is already larger than that of the Southern Command, which overseas US

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military operations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

About 1,400 National Guard troops have been formed into a dozen regional response units, while smaller quick-reaction forces have been set up in each of the 50 states. Northcom also has the power to mobilize four active-duty Army battalions, as well as Navy and Coast Guard ships and air defense fighter jets.

The Pentagon is acutely conscious of the potential political backlash as its role in future security operations becomes known. Graham writes: "Military exercises code-named Vital Archer, which involve troops in lead roles, are shrouded in secrecy. By contrast, other homeland exercises featuring troops in supporting roles are widely publicized."

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Military lawyers have studied the legal implications of such deployments, which risk coming into conflict with a longstanding congressional prohibition on the use of the military for domestic policing, known as *posse comitatus*. Involving the National Guard, which is exempt from *posse comitatus*, could be one solution, Admiral Keating told the *Post*. "He cited a potential situation in which Guard units might begin rounding up people while regular forces could not," Graham wrote.

Graham adds: "when it comes to ground forces possibly taking a lead role in homeland operations, senior Northcom officers remain reluctant to discuss specifics. Keating said such situations, if they arise, probably would be temporary, with lead responsibility passing back to civilian authorities."

A remarkable phrase: "probably would be temporary." In other words, the military takeover might not be temporary, and could become permanent!

In his article, Graham describes the Northern Command's "Combined Intelligence and Fusion Center, which joins military analysts with law enforcement and counterintelligence specialists from such civilian agencies as the FBI, the CIA and the Secret Service." The article continues: "A senior supervisor at the facility said the staff there does no intelligence collection, only analysis. He also said the military operates under long-standing rules intended to protect civilian liberties. The rules, for instance, block military access to intelligence information on political dissent or purely criminal activity."

Again, despite the soothing reassurances about respecting civil liberties, another phrase leaps out: "intelligence information on political dissent." What right do US intelligence agencies have to collect information on political dissent? Political dissent is not only perfectly legal, but essential to the functioning of a democracy.

The reality is that the military brass is intensely interested in monitoring political dissent because its domestic operations will be directed not against a relative handful of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists—who have not carried out a single operation inside the United States since September 11, 2001—but against the democratic rights of the American people.

The plans of Northcom have their origins not in the terrible events of 9/11, but in longstanding concerns in corporate America about the political stability of the United States. This is a society increasingly polarized between the fabulously wealthy elite at the top, and the vast majority of working people who face an increasingly difficult struggle to survive. The nightmare of the American ruling class is the emergence of a mass movement from below that challenges its political and economic domination.

As long ago as 1984—when Osama bin Laden was still working hand-in-hand with the CIA in the anti-Soviet guerrilla war in Afghanistan—the Reagan administration was drawing up similar contingency plans for military rule. A Marine Corps officer detailed to the National Security Council drafted plans for Operation Rex '84, a headquarters exercise that simulated rounding up 300,000 Central American immigrants and likely political opponents of a US invasion of Nicaragua or El Salvador and jailing them at mothballed military bases. This officer later became well known to the public: Lt. Colonel Oliver North, the organizer of the illegal network to arm the "contra" terrorists in Nicaragua and a principal figure in the Iran-Contra scandal.

As for the claims that these military plans are driven by genuine concern over

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the threat of terrorist attacks, these are belied by the actual conduct of the American ruling elite since 9/11. The Bush administration has done everything possible to suppress any investigation into the circumstances of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—most likely because its own negligence, possibly deliberate, would be exposed.

While the Pentagon claims that its plans are a response to the danger of nuclear, biological or chemical attacks, no serious practical measures have been taken to forestall such attacks or minimize their impact. The Bush administration and Congress have refused even to restrict the movement of rail tank cars loaded with toxic chemicals through the US capital, though even an accidental leak, let alone a terrorist attack, would cause mass casualties.

In relation to bioterrorism, the Defense Science Board determined in a 2000 study that the federal government had only 1 of the 57 drugs, vaccines and diagnostic tools required to deal with such an attack. According to a report in the *Washington Post* August 7, in the five years since the Pentagon report, only one additional resource has been developed, bringing the total to 2 out of 57. Drug companies have simply refused to conduct the research required to find antidotes to anthrax and other potential toxins, and the Bush administration has done nothing to compel them.

As for the danger of nuclear or “dirty-bomb” attacks, the Bush administration and the congressional Republican leadership recently rammed through a measure loosening restrictions on exports of radioactive substances, at the behest of a Canadian-based manufacturer of medical supplies which conducted a well-financed lobbying campaign.

Evidently, the administration and the corporate elite which it represents do not take seriously their own warnings about the imminent threat of terrorist attacks using nuclear, chemical or biological weapons—at least not when it comes to security measures that would impact corporate profits.

The anti-terrorism scare has a propaganda purpose: to manipulate the American people and induce the public to accept drastic inroads against democratic rights. As the Pentagon planning suggests, the American working class faces the danger of some form of military-police dictatorship in the United States.

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