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IRAQ : U.S. Military There are no plans to leave Iraq. By Dahr Jamail

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Why does the Bush Administration refuse to discuss withdrawing occupation forces from Iraq? Why is Halliburton, who landed the no-bid contracts to construct and maintain US military bases in Iraq, posting higher profits than ever before in its 86-year history?

Why do these bases in Iraq resemble self-contained cities as much as military outposts?

Why are we hearing such ludicrous and outrageous statements from the highest ranking military general in the United States, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace, who when asked how things were going in Iraq on March 9th in an interview on "Meet the Press" said, "I'd say they're going well. I wouldn't put a great big smiley face on it, but I would say they're going very, very well from everything you look at."

I wonder if there is a training school, or at least talking point memos for these Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, because Pace's predecessor, Gen. Richard Myers, told Senator John McCain last September that "In a sense, things are going well [in Iraq]."

General Pace also praised the Iraqi military, saying, "Now there are over 100 [Iraqi] battalions in the field."

Wow! General Pace must have waved his magic wand and materialized all these 99 new Iraqi battalions that are diligently keeping things safe and secure in occupied Iraq. Because according to the top US general in Iraq, General George Casey, not long ago there was only one Iraqi battalion (about 500-600 soldiers) capable of fighting on its own in Iraq.

During a late-September 2005 Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, Casey acknowledged that the Pentagon estimate of three Iraqi battalions last June had shrunk to one in September. That is less than six months ago.

I thought it would be a good idea to find someone who is qualified to discuss how feasible it would be to train 99 Iraqi battalions in less than six months, as Pace now claims has occurred.

I decided that someone who was in the US Army for 26 years and who worked in eight conflict areas, starting in Vietnam and ending with Haiti, would be qualified. If he had served in two parachute infantry units, three Ranger units, two Special Forces Groups and in Delta Force that would be helpful as well. And just to make sure, if he taught tactics at the Jungle Operations Training Center in Panama and Military Science at the United States Military Academy at West Point, thus knowing a thing or two about training soldiers, that would be a bonus.

That person is Stan Goff.

"This is utter bullshit," was Goff's remark about the Pace claim of having

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100 Iraqi battalions when I asked him to comment, "He must be counting the resistance among his forces."

Goff adds, "That dip-shit [Pace] is saying he has 60,000 trained and disciplined people under arms ... 65,000 with all the staffs ... and almost 100,000 with the support units they would require. To train and oversee them would require thousands of American advisors. It must suck for a career Marine to be used so blatantly as a PR flak."

Goff mentioned that Pace "and everyone else" knows that the Iraqi forces, "however many there are," are heavily cross-infiltrated.

"He [Pace] is saying that the Bush administration is going to empower a pro-Iranian government with 100 ready battalions, when this administration was handed this particular government as the booby prize in exchange for Sistani pulling their cookies out of the fire during the joint rebellions in Najaf and Fallujah," added Goff.

Further discrediting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Goff said, "To train 99 [battalions] since last September is a claim only the average American might swallow. The right question to ask is, where are they? Where are they headquartered, and where are they in operation? Claiming operations security doesn't count, unless they believe they can hide 100 units of 600 people each in Iraq ... from other Iraqis ... who are often related to them."

He concludes, "These guys have become accustomed to saying any damn thing, then counting on ignorance and apathy at home - along with hundreds of Democrats who need spine transplants - to get away with it. You can quote me on any of that."

There's a good reason why Pace and others are busy spewing smoke - it's to hide the fact that there are no plans to leave Iraq.

While we're addressing propaganda, we mustn't leave out our brilliant military strategist and warrior for protecting human rights, the illustrious Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

On March 8th, Rice delivered the opening remarks on the release of her Department's '2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.'

The introduction to the report says: "In Iraq, 2005 was a year of major progress for democracy, democratic rights and freedom. There was a steady growth of NGOs and other civil society associations that promote human rights."

Uh, right.

This report is submitted to Congress by the State Department. I've often wondered if our politicians are just this ignorant, or simply horrifically misinformed like so many Americans. This report, perhaps, answers the latter.

My point is, if there is a concerted effort by high-ranking officials of the Bush administration to portray things in Iraq as going well, then why are there permanent bases being constructed in Iraq?

This media smokescreen from the likes of Pace, Rice and even "sharp-shooter" Cheney, who recently said things in Iraq are "improving steadily," conveniently leads the American people toward believing there will eventually be a withdrawal of American soldiers.

But the problem with smokescreens is that pesky thing called "reality."

And in Iraq, the reality is that people like Pace, Rice, Cheney and their ever-eloquent front man aren't telling the American public about their true plans for Iraq.

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One example that provides some insight into their agenda is the US "Embassy" which is under construction in the infamous "Green Zone."

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As you read this, a controversial Kuwait-based construction firm is building a \$592 million US embassy in Baghdad. When the dust settles, this compound will be the largest and most secure diplomatic compound in the world.

The headquarters, I mean "Embassy," will be a self-sustaining cluster of 21 buildings reinforced 2.5 times the usual standards, with some walls to be as thick as 15 feet.

Plans are for over 1,000 US "government officials" to staff and reside there. Lucky for them, they will have access to the gym, swimming pool, barber and beauty shops, food court and commissary. There will also be a large-scale barracks for troops, a school, locker rooms, a warehouse, a vehicle maintenance garage, and six apartment buildings with a total of 619 one-bedroom units. And luckily for the "government officials," their water, electricity and sewage treatment plants will all be independent from Baghdad's city utilities. The total site will be two-thirds the area of the National Mall in Washington, DC."

I wonder if any liberated Iraqis will have access to their swimming pool?

And unlike the Iraqi infrastructure, which is in total shambles and functioning below pre-invasion levels in nearly every area, the US "Embassy" is being constructed right on time. The US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee recently called this an "impressive" feat, considering the construction is taking place in one of the most violent and volatile spots on the planet.

Then there are the permanent military bases.

To give you an idea of what these look like in Iraq, let's start with Camp Anaconda, near Balad. Occupying 15 square miles of Iraq, the base boasts two swimming pools (not the plastic inflatable type), a gym, mini-golf course and first-run movie theater.

The 20,000 soldiers who live at the Balad Air Base, less than 1,000 of whom ever leave the base, can inspect new iPod accessories in one of the two base exchanges, which have piles of the latest electronics and racks of CDs to choose from. One of the PX managers recently boasted that every day he was selling 15 televisions to soldiers.

At Camp Anaconda, located in al-Anbar province where resistance is fierce, the occupation forces live in air-conditioned units where plans are being drawn up to run internet, cable television and overseas telephone access to them.

The thousands of civilian contractors live at the base in a section called "KBR-land," and there is a hospital where doctors carry out 400 surgeries every month on wounded troops.

Air Force officials on the base claim the runway there is one of the busiest in the world, where unmanned Predator drones take off carrying their Hellfire missiles, along with F-16's, C-130's, helicopters, and countless others, as the bases houses over 250 aircraft.

If troops aren't up for the rather lavish dinners served by "Third Country Nationals" from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh who work for slave wages, they can visit the Burger King, Pizza Hut, Popeye's or Subway, then wash it down with a mocha from the Starbucks.

There are several other gigantic bases in Iraq besides camp Anaconda, such as Camp Victory near Baghdad Airport, which - according to a reporter for Mother Jones magazine - when complete will be twice the size of Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo. The Kosovo base is currently one of the largest overseas bases built since the war in Vietnam.

Camp Liberty is adjacent to Camp Victory - where soldiers even compete in their own triathlons. "The course, longer than 140 total miles, spanned several bases in the greater Camp Victory area in west Baghdad," says a news article on a DOD web site.

Mr. Bush refuses to set a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq because he doesn't intend to withdraw. He doesn't intend to because he's following a larger plan for the US in the Middle East.

Less than two weeks after the fall of Baghdad on April 9, 2003, US military officials announced the intention to maintain at least four large bases in Iraq that could be used in the future.

These are located near Baghdad International Airport (where the triathlon was), Tallil (near Nasiriyah, in the south), one in the Kurdish north at either Irbil or Qayyarah (they are only 50 kilometers apart) and one in western al-Anbar province at Al-Asad. Of course, let's not forget the aforementioned Camp Anaconda in Balad.

More recently, on May 22 of last year, US military commanders announced that they would consolidate troops into four large air bases. It was announced at this time that while buildings were being made of concrete instead of the usual metal trailers and tin-sheathed buildings, military officers working on the plan "said the consolidation plan was not meant to establish a permanent US military presence in Iraq."

Right.

The US has at least four of these massive bases in Iraq. Billions of dollars have been spent in their construction, and they are in about the same locations where they were mentioned they would be by military planners back before Mr. Bush declared that major combat operations were over in Iraq.

It appears as though 'mission accomplished' in Iraq was not necessarily referring to guarding the Ministry of Oil and occupying the country indefinitely (or finding WMDs, disrupting al-Qaeda, or liberating Iraqis, blah-blah-blah), but to having a military beach-head in the heart of the Middle East.

Note that while US officials don't dare say the word "permanent" when referring to military bases in Iraq, they will say "permanent access." An article entitled "Pentagon Expects Long-Term Access to Four Key Bases in Iraq," which was a front-page story in the New York Times on April 19, 2003, reads: "There will probably never be an announcement of permanent stationing of troops. Not permanent basing, but permanent access is all that is required, officials say."

Why all of this? Why these obviously permanent bases? Why the beach-head?

A quick glance at US government military strategy documents is even more revealing.

"Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States," reads the 2002 National Security Strategy.

To accomplish this, the US will "require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia."

Another interesting document is 'Joint Vision 2020' from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose "vision" is "Dedicated individuals and innovative organizations transforming the joint force of the 21st Century to achieve full spectrum dominance [**bold type theirs**]: persuasive in peace, decisive in war, preeminent in any form of conflict [*italics theirs*]."

US policymakers have replaced the Cold War with the Long War for Global

Empire and Unchallenged Military Hegemony. This is the lens through which we must view Iraq to better understand why there are permanent US bases there.

In the Quadrennial Defense Review Report released on February 6, 2006, there is a stated ambition to fight "multiple, overlapping wars" and to "ensure that all major and emerging powers are integrated as constructive actors and stakeholders into the international system." The report goes on to say that the US will "also seek to ensure that no foreign power can dictate terms of regional or global security. It will attempt to dissuade any military competitor from developing disruptive or other capabilities that could enable regional hegemony or hostile action against the United States or other friendly countries, and it will seek to deter aggression or coercion. Should deterrence fail, the United States would deny a hostile power its strategic and operational objectives."

In sum, what is the purpose of permanent US military garrisons in Iraq and the implicit goals of these government documents?


Empire.



Dahr Jamail is an independent journalist who spent over 8 months reporting from occupied Iraq. He presented evidence of US war crimes in Iraq at the International Commission of Inquiry on Crimes against Humanity Committed by the Bush Administration in New York City this January. He writes regularly for TruthOut.org, Inter Press Service, Asia Times, TomDispatch, and maintains his own website dahrjamailiraq.com.

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By : Johan
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