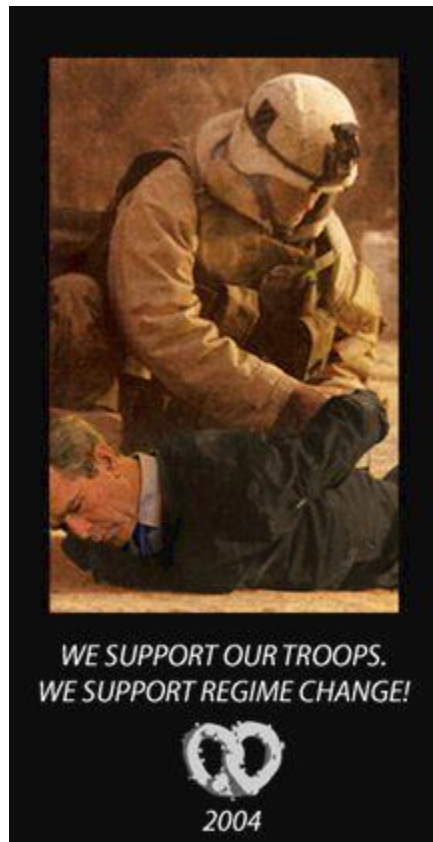


GI SPECIAL 2#56



<http://www.bringthemhomenow.com/>

Only “Bare Majority” Opposed To Withdrawal

April 09, 2004, By Liz Marlantes, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Current polls suggest that public opinion on the conflict could be approaching a tipping point. While Americans have always been divided over the war, a majority has consistently held that the US made the right decision in deposing Saddam Hussein.

But some polls now find a majority disapproving of Mr. Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq, and, according to a recent Pew survey, a sizable margin believes the administration does not have a plan to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion.

The number of Americans calling for the troops to come home is rising, with just a bare majority now favoring keeping US troops in the region.

If unrest continues, public support for the mission could quickly crumble - and the political consequences for Bush could be severe.

"Opinion is very fluid right now," says Carroll Doherty, editor of the Pew Research Report. "There's a sense that things are perhaps spinning out of control - and that's a very dangerous perception."

To a San Francisco fireman passing through Chicago's O'Hare airport, this is another Vietnam. Buying a newspaper from one of the vending boxes that line the terminal, some with inch-high headlines on the newest battles in Fallujah, this Democrat in a blue work shirt says the war "was falling apart before it even got started." People are dying for no reason, he continues, "and I suspect whoever replaces Saddam Hussein will be as bad or worse. **We have no right being there.**"

How would you grade President Bush's performance in handling the Iraq situation?

| | January 2004 | April 2004 |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Excellent | 29 % | 21 % |
| Good | 24 | 21 |
| Average | 16 | 15 |
| Poor | 13 | 15 |
| Unacceptable | 16 | 28 |

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and in Iraq, and information about other social protest movements here in the USA. **Send requests to address up top. For copies on web site see:**<http://www.notinourname.net/qi-special/>

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

General Strike In Baghdad

CNN reports 12:05 EDT that there is a general strike in Baghdad in support of the resistance in Falluja. "The whole city is eerily quiet."

Marine Lt. Col Calls Army Brig. General A Liar; Says No Orders For Faluja Cease Fire

Apr. 10, 2004 BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)

A US general called on Sunni militants in Fallujah on Saturday to join a bilateral cease-fire. Insurgents struck US troops in Baghdad and central Iraq, setting a tank on fire in the capital and engaging in battles that killed 40 Iraqis, a US spokesman said.

A Marine commander said he had no orders yet for a full cease-fire.

"I've got no direction of any kind on a cease-fire, so I will continue to fight until I'm instructed to do different. I don't know what the word is from Baghdad, but I've got word from my higher headquarters, and if they wanted me to hold up they would tell me," said Lt. Col. Brennan Byrne, commander of the 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment.

There was no immediate response from Sunni insurgents to the general's call in Fallujah, where bloody fighting has been raging all week, and a team of Iraqi leaders from Baghdad entered the city to hold talks with local leaders.

Explosions and sporadic gunfire were heard Saturday afternoon, and Marines largely remained in the industrial zone they hold in the eastern part of the city. Some Marines moved a few blocks into a nearby neighborhood, breaking into homes, witnesses said, in an apparent attempt to clear out resistance soldiers firing on them.

"Today what we are seeking is a bilateral ceasefire on the battlefield so we can allow for discussions," Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt told reporters in Baghdad.

"This is an aspiration," he said. He added that he was "hoping to get this message to the enemy through this press conference" and the Arabic press "so they can join the ceasefire." **(Hey asshole, how about "getting this message" to the Marines?)**

A party of 35 Iraqi officials _ including several Governing Council members _ entered the besieged city Saturday to hold talks with local leaders. **Council members have expressed increasing anger over the US siege, calling it a "mass punishment" for its 200,000 residents.**

When ordered on Friday to halt all offensive operations, Marines complained that doing so would expose them to insurgent attacks. So they demanded and received the right to conduct offensive operations necessary to prevent attacks on their positions - a more aggressive stance than only responding to attacks.

During Friday's unilateral halt began, they did not advance into residential area to engage gunmen there. **But one Marine was killed Friday and another wounded in exchanges of fire.**

During Friday's pause, a stream of cars headed out of the city, carrying families trying to escape the violence. **Marines allowed women, children and the elder to leave, but turned back men.**

Fallujah residents emerged from their homes for the first time in days Friday, with many burying their dead in the city's football stadium since cemeteries on the city's edge could not be reached.

Abdul-Karim Mahoud al-Mohammedawi, a Shiite on the Governing Council, announced he was suspending his council seat until "the bleeding stops in all Iraq." He also met Friday with al-Sadr, whom US commanders have vowed to capture.

A Sunni council member, Ghazi al-Yawer, said he would quit if the Fallujah talks fell through.

AIRMAN DIES IN MORTAR ATTACK

April 10, 2004 HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND
Release Number: 04-04-16C

BALAD AIR BASE, Iraq – A mortar attack occurred at approximately 12:20 am today at Balad Air Base, killing one Airman and injuring two others.

One Airman is in serious condition at the Army Combat Support Hospital, and the other was treated and released.

Shia Mahdi Army Stands Down For Religious Holiday

Occupation Retakes Kut---NOT!

(Correction: Yesterday, GI Special carried a press report that Occupation forces have retaken Kut. Today, CNN reports Occupation forces have retaken "about 60% of Kut.")

Apr. 10, 2004 BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)

An al-Sadr official said fighters would not attack US-led coalition forces in the city until after a religious ceremonies Sunday, during which hundreds of thousands of Shiite pilgrims will be in the city.

US commanders have also suggested they will hold off on trying to uproot al-Sadr's militia from Karbala and nearby Najaf and Kufa until after the al-Arbaeen ceremonies, which mark the end of the mourning period for the 7th-century martyred Shiite saint, Imam Hussein.

Huge numbers of pilgrims are already in Karbala, where the Imam Hussein Shrine at the center of the ceremonies is located. There was no sound of fighting in the city Saturday. "We decided to halt the military activities until the end of al-Arba'een," said Khudeir al-Ansari, head of al-Sadr's office in Karbala.

In their first major military move into south in months, around 1,000 US troops backed by tanks swept into the city of Kut on Wednesday to push out al-Sadr militiamen who had seized control

Kimmit said al-Sadr followers were driven from *much of* Kut in the initial assault, and he expected *the rest of the city to be under U.S. control soon.*

Resistance Opens Attacks In Baqouba; “Just Ordinary People” Join In, Officer Says: “Several” U.S. Troops Wounded

Apr. 10, 2004 BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)

Insurgents attacked U.S. troops and Iraqi security forces north of Baghdad, sparking fierce overnight battles that left at least 40 Iraqis dead and several soldiers wounded, a U.S. military spokesman said on Saturday.

The fighting in Baqouba began with simultaneous rocket attacks late Friday on an Iraqi police station, the governor's office and a compound housing the U.S. military's civil affairs office, said Capt. Issam Bornaes, spokesman for the 1st Infantry Division's 3rd Brigade.

Among those killed were at least 11 civilians, said Dr. Fouad Hussein at Baqouba General Hospital. Thirty-five others were injured, he said.

The assailants opened fire with rocket-propelled grenades and rifles against the targets, sparking small fires in each location. Fighting quickly spread throughout the city of 26,000 people.

"This was a well-coordinated attack in certain areas, but in others just ordinary frustrated people seemed to come out and take some shots at American soldiers," Bornaes said. "It's hard to separate the wheat from the chaff."

U.S. forces also bulldozed the local headquarters of radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose militiamen have been battling coalition forces throughout southern parts of the country.

At one point in the fighting, U.S. forces fired heavy artillery at a group of about 100 gunmen who had gathered near a bridge leading into town. Soldiers saw insurgents dragging bodies away from the scene.

The fighting marred a relative lull in fighting in the city. **(Yeah, you could say that.)**

The fighting had tapered off by midday Saturday, but shops remained closed and few residents were out on the streets. **Local units of the U.S.-trained Iraqi security forces did not show up for work at checkpoints and police stations.**

Tank, Supply Convoy Burning In Baghdad



A US armored personnel carrier (APC) takes position near a burning Abrams tank attacked by insurgents on the Baghdad-Fallujah highway.(AFP/Nicolas Asfour)

Apr. 10, 2004 BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)

Insurgents fought US troops in Baghdad's northern, mainly Sunni neighborhood of al-Azamiyah.

Guerrillas attacked a tank on a highway near the airport in western Baghdad on Saturday, setting it on fire.

Also in the west of the city, a convoy of supply trucks being escorted by two US Humvees was attacked. One of the trucks was set ablaze and the driver kidnapped, said Majid Hameed, a witness. There was no immediate confirmation of the kidnapping of the driver, whose nationality was not known.

Group Claims 30 Foreign Hostages

10 April, 2004 DUBAI (Reuters)

An Iraqi group says in footage aired by an Arab TV station it is holding 30 foreign hostages and threatened to decapitate them unless U.S. forces lifted their blockade of the town of Falluja.

"We are calling for the withdrawal of American and coalition forces. We have Japanese, Bulgarian, Israeli, American, Spanish and Korean hostages. Their numbers are 30," a masked man holding a Kalashnikov rifle said in the broadcast on Saturday.

"If America doesn't lift its blockade of Falluja their heads will be cut off," he said. The footage did not show any of the alleged hostages.

German Elite Counterterrorism Agents Captured; Experts On Freeing Hostages Taken Hostage; Drove Into Iraq Because Flying Too Dangerous

BERLIN, Germany (CNN) -- The German Foreign Ministry has confirmed that two of its security staff assigned to the German Embassy in Baghdad are missing. German media reports Saturday said they were part of a convoy driving from Amman, Jordan, to Baghdad three days ago.

ARD television reported that the two were agents with GSG-9, an elite counterterrorism unit trained for freeing hostages and other commando missions.

Many people used land routes to come into Iraq because of the danger of planes being hit by missiles.

Anti-Occupation Demonstrators Shot In Mosul

Apr 10, 2004 MOSUL, Iraq (Reuters)

U.S. forces killed three people it said were insurgents after clashes broke out at a demonstration in front of Mosul city hall on Friday, the statement said.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed in the city of Mosul, 390 km (240 miles) north of Baghdad, after the clashes.

There have been demonstrations in support of those fighting the occupation in many towns to the north, several of which have turned violent.

TROOP NEWS

Top Generals Say No More Troops Left For Iraq; Split Between General Staff And Bush Régime Widens

09/04/2004 By David Rennie in Washington, www.telegraph.com.uk

America's top commander in Iraq has warned Washington that he will not be "the fall guy" if violence in the country worsens, it emerged yesterday, as word leaked out that US generals are "outraged" by their lack of soldiers.

America's generals consider current troop strengths of 130,000 in Iraq inadequate, reported the columnist Robert Novak, a doyen of the old-school Right in Washington.

Officers who will not speak out in public let it be known that major reinforcements might be impossible to find. US forces are so overstretched in Iraq and Afghanistan that "there are simply no large units available and suitable for assignment", Novak wrote in his column in The Washington Post.

Relations between the uniformed military and the Pentagon's civilian chiefs are currently worse than at any time in living memory, Novak wrote, citing a former high-ranking national security official who served in previous Republican administrations.

A new account of the war, *In the Company of Soldiers*, reveals that in May 2003 Pentagon planners "predicted that US troop levels would be down to 30,000 by late summer [of 2003]".

(For more, see the article "What's next in Iraq?" By Tariq Ali, p. 6 at www.socialistworker.org.)

1st Armored Totally Fucked; Return From Iraq Cancelled; Pentagon Finds It "Convenient" For Them To Stay And Die For Oil And Empire

April 9, 2004 By JOHN J. LUMPKIN, The Associated Press

WASHINGTON - **Soldiers with the 1st Armored Division, who had expected to return home in the coming weeks, were told to prepare to remain in Iraq for up to three months during this period of heightened violence, U.S. officials said Friday.**

Maj. Gen. Martin Dempsey, commander of the 1st Armored, told the troops this week to expect their tour to be extended.

Most of the unit is based in Germany, and a sizable contingent is based at Fort Riley, Kan. **It has been stationed in Baghdad, and was scheduled to be replaced by the 1st Cavalry Division, which is already in Iraq.**

On Thursday, Gen. John Abizaid, head of U.S. Central Command, told The Washington Post he wanted to increase his combat power in Iraq by 10,000 troops. **By preventing the 1st Armored from rotating home, he would accomplish that because it would supplement forces that have recently arrived to take its place.**

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said that there are 135,000 American troops in Iraq, and he indicated that U.S. commanders want to hold that level "for some period" rather than reduce to 115,000 as previously planned.

The main body of 1st Armored is the last of several units to complete a cycle of rotation duties; most of the others have already returned home. For this reason, it was seen as the most convenient option to bolster the U.S. forces, defense officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Zinni Saw The Contradiction Coming;

Braggart Col. Russell Saw Nothing Except His Own Idiot Face In The Mirror

Newsweek, March 15, 2004

Retired General Anthony Zinni, who headed the U.S. Central Command from 1997 to 2000, says the garrison strategy is “good because it drives down U.S. casualties, but it’s bad because it means you’re throwing everything onto an Iraqi security force that clearly is not prepared to take it on. You’re going to see them pay a hell of a price.”

Officers in the new Iraqi security corps say the occupation is at a critical phase where the U.S. needs to ease up. “If they do not,” says General Abdullah Hussein Jabara, who works with Iraq’s security forces, the bad feelings will continue to grow.”

But some officers privately call these velvet-glove aspirations naive. When U.S. troops are holed up in garrisons on the outskirts of cities and towns, says New York University law professor Noah Feldman, who has advised the Administration on Iraq, “they have a tendency to look like wimps.” That’s a perception the insurgents are certain to put to the test.

Lieut. Colonel Russell says “these people respect strength.” His unit employed some of the most controversial tactics the occupation has seen: mass detentions, firing on suspected guerrilla positions amid civilians, demolishing houses, even ringing a troublesome village with barbed wire to make all residents pass through a single military checkpoint when they came or went. “We were trying to solve a problem:” says Russell, **“We didn’t really care what the reaction would be. They hate our guts. There wasn’t any support to erode.”**

Those methods, he says, “worked. We’ll go home victors.” (This may go down in history as one of the outstanding delusions of any officer who served in Iraq.)

Broken Strategy

Before heading out to Iraq last spring, Marine commanders explained that they would try to take a gentler approach than the Army. They would avoid using military tactics that would risk civilian casualties, learn Arabic and take off their sunglasses when talking with Iraqis. **"If to kill a terrorist we have got to kill eight innocent people, you don't kill them," Maj. Gen. James Mattis told The Times's Michael Gordon.**

GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT THE NEW APRILTRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans’ benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it’s in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our

goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers. <http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

Government Killing Vets In V.A. Shithole “Hospitals” Filth, Corruption, Incompetence Rule; Staff Punished For Trying To Stop Abuse

ABC News, April 8, 2004

Recently, there have been new stories of misdiagnosis, disastrous management and deficient care at some of the nation's 162 facilities.

At a hospital near Cleveland, an ABCNEWS hidden-camera investigation found bathrooms filthy with what appeared to be human excrement. Supply cabinets were in disarray, with dirty linens from some patients mixed in with clean supplies, or left in hallways on gurneys.

At a neighboring facility, examining tables had dried blood and medications still on them. In several areas, open bio-hazardous waste cans were spilling over. *Primetime* obtained internal memos documenting that the equipment used to sterilize surgical instruments had broken down — causing surgical delays and possible infection risks.

"Once you come back to be a veteran, it's like a black hole, you know — nothing," former Army Sgt. Vanessa Turner told ABCNEWS.

Turner was stricken with a mysterious illness while on duty in Iraq this past year. She retired from the military on medical grounds, and when she reported to a VA hospital for treatment, doctors scheduled her for an appointment six months later.

Veterans who responded to a survey by the American Legion in 2003 said it took an average of seven months to get a first appointment at a VA hospital. In some hospitals, patients have waited as long as two years.

In 1999, Jack Christensen, a former army sergeant who served in the Korean War, was admitted to the VA hospital in Temple, Texas, with pneumonia, and ended up staying three years.

Christensen's wife, Pat, says the attitude of some of the practical nurses was shocking. Some of the patients were forced to beg for food and water, she says. Instead of helping her husband go to the bathroom, she said, "they would put a towel under his hips and tell him to use the towel."

Pat Christensen said her husband's condition worsened over several months — so badly that at one point he developed horrific bedsores and dangerous infections, and she says his doctors said they would have to amputate his legs.

Pat moved her husband to a private facility, where his infection healed and he underwent extensive physical therapy. She sued the VA, and then used the money to pay for private care for her husband. The VA denied liability but paid a settlement.

Dr. Jonathan Perlin, the deputy undersecretary for health, said the VA system has sophisticated quality control. But when he was shown ABCNEWS' hidden-camera video of hallways and supply closets in disarray, he said, "This is something we're not proud of."

Terry Soles served in the Navy during the Vietnam War. His wife, Denise, says he was one casualty of this practice. In 1998, he went to the VA hospital in Cleveland complaining of pain and diarrhea, and doctors removed small cancerous growths from his stomach and esophagus.

But as his symptoms persisted over the next two years, his wife says the VA gave him painful tests and repeatedly lost the results. His wife says Soles was seen by a parade of constantly rotating resident doctors, and there was little consistency in his care.

Once, Soles was prepped for surgery but before the operation the doctors who were present couldn't agree on what they were going to do, she said.

Before he got sick, the 6-foot Soles weighed more than 200 pounds. By the time his family finally decided to take him to a private hospital, he weighed 80 pounds. Some VA doctors thought his problem was psychosomatic.

When he could no longer recognize his own son, Soles was rushed to a private hospital. There, Soles learned he was "a total mass of cancer from his trachea to his renal bowel. And that there was nothing that could be done," his wife says. Terry Soles died three days later.

Critics charge that one of the big problems facing the VA is that too much money goes toward administration, at the cost of nursing and patient care.

Dean Billik, the former director of the VA in Charleston, S.C., is brought up as an example.

In 1996, he was denounced for allegedly spending about \$200,000 in taxpayer money to redecorate his office; \$1.5 million to renovate a nursing home unit that stayed empty for two years; and tens of thousands of dollars for a fish tank in the lobby — while there were budget shortfalls and staff cutbacks were contemplated.

Congress heard testimony claiming Billik was "blatant in his mismanagement," and an inspector general's report confirmed several of the numerous allegations against him.

But after everything was brought to light, Billik still got a bigger job: He was put in charge of the third-largest hospital system in the VA, encompassing eight cities, 295 acres of land and 83 buildings. And his salary immediately jumped about \$15,000.

Primetime obtained budget information on the central Texas VA system for Billik's six-year tenure at the top. **It confirms that Billik cut spending \$2 million for the people in direct patient care — nurses aides and practical nurses.**

Other documents obtained by *Primetime* show that \$129 million was spent on construction at three of six facilities in Temple, Texas.

One source says Billik spent \$1.8 million renovating a building at Temple for his own offices — after it had been renovated for patient care.

Furthermore, Nancy Kelsey, who was a nurse at one of the Temple facilities under Billik's supervision, says the way some of the staff treated patients was alarming. She says IVs ran out, patients were neglected and dressings weren't changed.

Melba Bell, whose husband, Ed, served in Korea, said the staff was often idle and it would often take hours to get help. **Other families said that if patients or their families persisted in asking for help, some of the staff retaliated.**

At one point, Bell's infection got so bad that the hospital used maggots to try to eat away the decay. That's not unusual treatment, but what happened afterward was.

"The dressing that they had on there was real poorly done," said Bell's granddaughter, Chesney Shirmer. "Some of the maggots got out and they were in the bed with him, you know? He could feel them in the bed."

Ed Bell died of gangrene in the VA hospital in 2002.

But there is one more problem. Many whistle-blowers and critics say if you try to expose the truth, VA managers don't want to hear it.

Charles Steinert, who worked for Billik in Charleston, says he felt pressure to leave after he complained about some of the building projects and how he was being treated by supervisors.

Nurse Melissa Craven, who also worked at the Charleston VA, says she suffered retribution for two years after she spoke out about some of her supervisors.

Perlin said it is easy for patients and their loved ones to lodge complaints about VA care. "That's important to us, because if there are concerns, we want to address them," he said. **But many patients and their loved ones told ABCNEWS that wasn't their experience — and even worse, many of the families are afraid to speak out.**

"They're afraid to say what really goes on, because they're afraid any little benefits that they have are going to be taken away from them," said Denise Soles.

The day after *Primetime* presented its findings to the VA's Perlin, he ordered inspections of the facilities *Primetime* investigated.

They found a number of problems at the Temple, Texas, VA, including poor hygiene, insufficient staffing and low satisfaction among patients and their families.

The VA announced it would bring in new supervisors, reassign some personnel, train others, and begin recruiting additional staff.

Inspectors who went to the VA in Cleveland said it was in good condition. However, after their visit, *Primetime* received phone calls from several sources saying that the hospital had advance warning of the so-called surprise inspection.

Veterans and their families agree they deserve better. "They were good enough to go fight for their country," said Melba Bell. "They deserve to have the best treatment that they could get."

Denise Soles says that before her husband died he asked just one thing of her: to speak out.

She said Terry Soles told her, "If we can help one other veteran from going through the hell ... That's what we have to do."



Beetle Bailey Army Times 4.12.04

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP



An Iraqi flashes the 'V' for victory sign near a burning truck attacked by insurgents on the road leading to Baghdad's International Airport. The truck was part of a US military convoy. (AFP/Karim Sahib)

Kut In Rewind

(Thursday, the U.S. Command in Baghdad proudly announced that Kut had been retaken from the Shia resistance army. Friday, the U.S. Command in Baghdad just as proudly announced that 60% of Kut had been retaken. Now, a reporter reports that none of Kut has been retaken, but the Occupation announces it soon will be. Baghdad Bob must be writing their material. A few more victories like this and they'll be lifting Bremer off the Hq roof in a helicopter.)

MORE:

Kut;
“The Madhi Army Are Our Brothers”
“All Of Us Will Attack The Americans”
Ukrainian Soldiers Say No To Combat;

April 9, 2004 By Nicholas Riccardi, L.A. Times Staff Writer

KUT, Iraq - Many here aren't sure who controls this southern city.

Ukrainian troops with the U.S.-led coalition have abandoned their base and fled to a more fortified one. The commander of the Iraqi police says he reports to the occupation authority. Traffic police say they work for the radical anti-American cleric Muqtader Sadr.

Government buildings are locked. Schools are closed. The streets are empty. And from its offices on the Tigris River, Sadr's volunteer militia proclaims that it runs the town.

"We want liberty for our people, we want peace for our people, we don't want to hurt anyone," said Sheik Mohammed Alag, the commander of Sadr's forces in Kut, as dozens of black-clad men with Kalashnikov rifles and daggers milled around his office.

Gunfire and mortar rounds sounded in the distance as militia members fired at the heavily fortified base outside the city to which the Ukrainian forces had withdrawn.

The top U.S. military commander in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, vowed to retake Kut "imminently."

Like many Shiite Muslim cities once repressed by Saddam Hussein, Kut was once friendly to the occupation forces. But chronic unemployment here has led to widespread disenchantment with the new Iraq and fueled the ranks of Sadr's Al Mahdi army.

"Most of these youths are unemployed, they are teenagers," said a local tribal leader, Sheik Nimar Ali Mnahi. "They will join anything."

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry released a statement saying its troops had moved to the more fortified base because they were in danger and were not in Iraq for combat. Militia members planted their flag at the abandoned site.

Uniformed members of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps stood guard outside the empty base Thursday and insisted that they controlled it. Police said the Ukrainians' military equipment had been secured.

Sadr's picture was displayed at the ICDC checkpoint at the entrance to Kut, and even some police officers who said they disliked the fiery young cleric were hanging his picture in their car windows to ward off trouble.

Some police were thrilled with the city's new rulers. "We don't want the occupation," said traffic officer Mohsin Ghirbal. "Who is in the Mahdi army? They are all our relatives, they are brothers. They are not strangers."

The local police commander, Abdulhahim Amir, said he answered to the coalition-appointed Iraqi interior minister - who was resigning in Baghdad as the commander spoke. Amir said that his officers were on their regular beats and that they had had "no problem" with Sadr's forces.

"If we are going to stay like this without any jobs, then all of us will attack the Americans," warned Hamid Hasan, 22, a former Iraqi soldier who is now unemployed.

Hassan said he disapproved of the conflict with Sadr's militia but supported some of the cleric's demands. Sadr has called on Americans to reopen a newspaper sympathetic to him that they shut down two weeks ago.

"After the toppling of Saddam we breathed the breath of freedom," Hassan said. "So why are they closing the newspaper? In the United States there are several newspapers that attack George Bush. Why do they not let us do so?"

Resistance Hits Kirkuk Cops

Apr. 10, 2004 BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP)

In the northern city of Kirkuk the resistance attacked Iraqi security forces, killing two and kidnapping three Kurdish officers, a commander of the Iraqi force said.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Gaming Out Iraq; Sustani Plays The Sadr Card

(This Imperial "game," being played out between Washington and Teheran, is what U.S. soldiers and Iraqis are dying for.)

THE STRATFOR WEEKLY 08 April 2004

If current trends accelerate, the United States faces a serious military challenge that could lead to disaster. The United States does not have the forces necessary to put down a broad-based Shiite rising and crush the Sunni rebellion as well. Even the current geography of the rising is beyond the capabilities of existing deployments or any practicable number of additional forces that might be made available. The United States is already withdrawing from some cities.

The logical outcome of all of this would be an enclave strategy, in which the United States concentrates its forces -- in a series of fortified locations -- perhaps excluding Iraqi nationals -- and leaves the rest of the country to the guerrillas.

That, of course, would raise the question of why the United States should bother to remain in Iraq, since those forces would not be able to exert effective force either inside the country or beyond its borders.

That would force a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.

One of the purposes of the war was to disprove al Qaeda's assertion that the United States was actually militarily weak and that it could not engage in close combat in the Islamist world, certainly not in the face of a mass uprising. An American withdrawal would prove al Qaeda's claims and would energize Islamists not only with hatred of the

United States, but also -- and worse -- with contempt for American power. It would create the worst of all possible worlds for the United States.

The first U.S. impulse after the fall of Baghdad was that Americans would govern Iraq indefinitely, on their terms -- and without compromising with Iranian sympathizers. That plan was blown out of the water by the unexpected emergence of a Sunni guerrilla force. The United States needed indigenous help. Even more than help, it needed guarantees that the Shia would not rise up and render the U.S. presence in Iraq untenable.

The United States and the Shiite elites -- Iranian and Iraqi -- reached an accommodation: The United States guaranteed the Shia a democratic government, which meant that the majority Shia would dominate -- and the Shia maintained the peace in the south. They did not so much collaborate with the Americans as maintain a peace that permitted the United States to deal with the Sunnis. The end state of all of this was to be a Shiite government that would permit some level of U.S. forces to remain indefinitely in Iraq.

As the Sunni rising subsided, the United States felt a decreased dependency on the Shia. The transitional Iraqi government that is slated to take power June 30 would not be an elected government, but rather a complex coalition of groups -- including Shia, Kurds and Sunnis, as well as small ethnic groups -- that would be constituted so as to give all the players a say in the future. In other words, the Shia would not get a Shiite-dominated government June 30.

It was for this reason that al-Sistani began to agitate for direct elections. He knew that the Shia would win that election and that this was the surest path to direct Shiite power. Washington argued there was not enough time for direct elections -- a claim that was probably true -- but which **the Shia saw as the United States backpedaling on fundamental agreements.**

Al-Sistani made it clear that he did not trust the transitional plan and that he did not believe it protected Shiite interests or represented American promises. The United States treated al-Sistani with courtesy and respect but made it clear that it was not planning to change its position.

In the meantime, a sea change had taken place in Iranian politics, with a conservative government driving the would-be reformers out of power. The conservatives did not object to the deal with the United States, but they wanted to be certain that the United States did not for a moment believe that the Iranians were acting out of weakness. The continual hammering by the United States on the nuclear issue with Iran convinced the Iranians that the Washington did not fully appreciate the position it was in.

As Iranian Expediency Council chief and former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani bluntly put it Feb. 24: "They continue to send us threatening messages and continue to raise the four questions," referring to Washington's concerns about Iran's nuclear program, opposition to the Middle East peace process, alleged support of militant groups and human rights. "But they are stuck in the mud in Iraq, and they know that if Iran wanted to, it could make their problems even worse."

Al-Sistani did not want the June 30 transition to go forward on U.S. terms. The Iranians did not want the United States to think it had Iran on the defensive. **A confrontation with the United States under these circumstances was precisely what was in both al-Sistani and Iran's interests.** Both wanted to drive home to the Americans that they held power in Iraq and that the United States was there at the sufferance of the Shia. The United States had forgotten its sense of desperation during the Sunni Ramadan offensive, and the Shia needed to remind them -- but they needed to do so without a rupture with Washington, which was, after all, instrumental to their long-term plans.

Al-Sadr was the perfect instrument. He was dangerous, deniable and manageable. U.S. officials have expressed surprise that al-Sadr -- who they did not regard highly -- was able to create such havoc. Obviously, al-Sistani could have dealt with al-Sadr if and when he wished. But for the moment, al-Sistani didn't wish. He wanted to show the Americans the abyss they faced if they continued on the path to June 30 without modifying the plan.

The Americans have said al-Sistani has not been helpful in this crisis. He is not ready to be helpful and won't be until a more suitable understanding is reached with the United States. He will act in due course because it is not in al-Sistani's interests to allow al-Sadr to become too strong. Quite the contrary: Al-Sistani runs the risk that the situation will get so far out of hand that he will not be able to control it either.

But al-Sistani is too strong for al-Sadr to undermine, and al-Sadr is, in fact, al-Sistani's pawn. Perhaps more precisely, al-Sadr is al-Sistani's ace in the hole. Having played him, al-Sistani will be as interested in liquidating al-Sadr's movement as the United States is -- once Washington has modified its plans for a postwar Iraq.

The Shia are a long-term threat, but their interests are not in war with the United States, but in achieving a Shiite-dominated Iraqi state as quickly as possible -- without giving the United States an opportunity to double-cross them. Al-Sistani demanded elections and didn't get them. What he really wants is a different transition process that gives the Shia more power. After the past week, he is likely to get it. And Washington will not soon forget who controls Iraq.

The strategic reality of the U.S. forces in Iraq is permanent. Those forces are there because of the sufferance of the Iraqi Shia. The Shia know it, and they want the Americans to know it. With Washington planning an offensive in Pakistan, the last thing it needs is to pump more forces into Iraq. In due course, al-Sistani will become helpful, but the price will be even higher than before.

OCCUPATION REPORT

General Calls Bremer Liar

09 April 2004 Aljazeera

"As of noon today coalition forces have initiated a unilateral suspension of offensive operations in Falluja," Paul Bremer told reporters on Friday.

But, the US-led occupation's deputy director of operations, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, denied the reports of a ceasefire.

Minutes after Bremer's announcement, US forces carried out a fresh offensive on Falluja bombing the town from the air. Scores of residents were injured in the attack, reported our correspondent.

Earlier, the Iraqi Governing Council member Mohsin Abd al-Hameed in a statement on behalf of his Iraqi Islamic party to Aljazeera said military action in Falluja would end for a period of 24 hours.

Aljazeera, meanwhile, has learnt that during negotiations to end the military offensive, US forces imposed many conditions including getting the Aljazeera crew out of the town.

Fury Ignites Solidarity In Iraq; "Bremer United Iraq: Against Him"

By Naomi Klein, April 9, 2004 Los Angeles Times

BAGHDAD - April 9, 2003, was the day this city fell to U.S. forces. One year later, it is rising up against them.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld claims that the resistance is just a few "thugs, gangs and terrorists." This is dangerous, wishful thinking. The war against the occupation is now being fought out in the open, by regular people defending their homes - an Iraqi intifada.

"They stole our playground," an 8-year-old boy in Sadr City told me this week, pointing at six tanks parked in a soccer field next to a rusty jungle gym. The field is a precious bit of green in an area of Baghdad that is otherwise a swamp of raw sewage and uncollected garbage.

Sadr City has seen little of Iraq's multibillion-dollar "reconstruction," which is partly why Muqtader Sadr and his Al Mahdi army have so much support here. Before U.S. occupation chief L. Paul Bremer III provoked Sadr into an armed conflict by shutting down his newspaper and arresting and killing his deputies, the Al Mahdi army was not fighting coalition forces; it was doing their job for them.

After all, in the year it has controlled Baghdad, the Coalition Provisional Authority still hasn't managed to get the traffic lights working or to provide the most basic security for civilians. So in Sadr City, Sadr's so-called "outlaw militia" can be seen engaged in such subversive activities as directing traffic and guarding factories. It was Bremer who created Iraq's security vacuum; Sadr simply filled it.

But as the June 30 "handover" to Iraqi control approaches, Bremer now sees Sadr and the Al Mahdi as a threat that must be eliminated - at any cost to the communities that have grown to depend on them. Which is why stolen playgrounds were only the start of what I saw in Sadr City this week. At Al Thawra Hospital, I met Raad Daier, an ambulance driver with a bullet in his abdomen, one of 12 shots he says were fired at his ambulance from a U.S. Humvee. At the time of the attack, according to hospital officials, he was carrying six people injured by U.S. forces, including a pregnant woman who had been shot in the stomach and lost her baby.

I saw charred cars, which dozens of eyewitnesses said had been hit by U.S. missiles, and I confirmed with hospitals that their drivers had been burned alive. I also visited Block 37 of the Chuadir District, a row of houses where every door was riddled with holes. Residents said U.S. tanks drove down their street firing into homes. Five people were killed, including Murtada Muhammad, age 4.

And Thursday, I saw something that I feared more than any of this: a copy of the Koran with a bullet hole through it. It was lying in the ruins of what was Sadr's headquarters in Sadr City. A few hours earlier, witnesses said, U.S. tanks broke down the walls of the center after two guided missiles pierced its roof. The worst damage, however, was done by hand. Clerics at the Sadr office said soldiers entered the building and shredded photographs of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the top Shiite cleric in Iraq. When I arrived at the destroyed center, the floor was covered with torn religious texts, including copies of the Koran that had been ripped and shot through with bullets. And it did not escape the notice of the Shiites here that hours earlier, U.S. soldiers had bombed a Sunni mosque in Fallouja.

For months, the White House has been making ominous predictions of a civil war breaking out between the majority Shiites, who believe it's their turn to rule Iraq, and the minority Sunnis, who want to hold onto the privileges they amassed under Saddam Hussein. But this week, the opposite appeared to have taken place.

Both Sunnis and Shiites have seen their homes attacked and their religious sites desecrated. Up against a shared enemy, they are beginning to bury ancient rivalries and join forces against the occupation. Instead of a civil war, they are on the verge of building a common front. You could see it at the mosques in Sadr City on Thursday: Thousands of Shiites lined up to donate blood destined for Sunnis hurt in the attacks in Fallouja. "We should thank Paul Bremer," Salih Ali told me. "He has finally united Iraq. Against him."

Naomi Klein is author of "Fences and Windows: Dispatches From the Front Lines of the Globalization Debate" (Picador, 2002).

OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION

BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

**Kerry Demands Bush Not Pull Out
Of Iraq;
“We Cannot Fail Now”
“My Exit Strategy Is Success”**

Newsweek, March 15, 2004

Whatever his criticisms of Bush's war, **Kerry says, he is committed to finishing the mission. “My exit strategy is success,”** he says, “a viable, stable Iraq that can contribute to the stability and peace in the Middle East.”

Among the first things Kerry would do as President, says Samuel Berger, who was a National Security Adviser under Bill Clinton and has consulted with Kerry on the subject, would be to tell the American people to **“put aside your misgivings or whatever you thought about this in the beginning. We cannot fail now.”**

When it comes to Iraq's future, Kerry often sounds tougher than the President. He has accused the Bush team of considering “a cut-and-ran strategy” to reduce the U.S. role in Iraq in time for the November election. “It would be a disaster and a disgraceful betrayal of principle,” Kerry said in December, because stability can't come without security

Comment:

Is there anyone left out there by now not fully aware that Kerry is every bit as committed as Bush to killing more U.S. troops and more Iraqis to serve the Empire? If you come across someone who still has illusions about Kerry, please pass this along, and remind them that no election ever stopped a war.

That's done by building real movements on the ground, not shilling for some Imperial killers' White House campaign.

The plain fact that Bush, Kerry, and Nader are all publicly committed to continuing the bloody Occupation of Iraq merely proves the point.

In fact, we owe the three of them a debt of thanks for showing up the complete bankruptcy of the electoral system, a wholly owned subsidiary of the U.S. ruling class of the wealthy and powerful.

It has never been clearer that there is no way forward now but building a movement from below to stop this war, regardless of what the three Imperial candidates say or do.

The politics of Bush, Kerry and Nader all reek of the blood of American soldiers and Iraqis. Supporting any one of them supports and defends the Empire: nothing more, and nothing less.

There will be some on the left willing to shut their eyes to what Nader is actually for in Iraq: fewer U.S. soldiers, and more Imperial soldiers from other nations killing Iraqis instead.

As the burnt-out political operatives for this collection of stooges for the Empire make their way into the swamp of left imperialism, all we have to say to them is [as was famously said nearly 100 years ago]: Let go of our hand.

We will also meet lots of good people, in the armed services and in our workplaces, who have illusions about Kerry, Nader and the electoral system. They are not the enemy. They are our future allies.

Without giving one minute of time or one ounce of support to Kerry or Nader, our job is to win them to what can stop the war--building a movement that can bring all the politicians to their knees. T

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to the E-mail address up top. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

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