

BUSH'S IRAQ "SURGE": "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED" THIS TIME ?

A year ago George Bush announced his new Iraq strategy: a "surge" of more U.S. troops. Bush now says the surge is a success. Is he right? Or is this another "Mission Accomplished" or "Slam Dunk Finding WMD" fantasy?

Is Violence Down? And Why?

Casualty levels in Iraq went down for the last few months of 2007. But an average of 20 Iraqi civilians a day still die in political violence. There are 600 attacks a month on U.S. and Iraqi troops.

But it's not the surge that has diminished violence. Fewer people are being killed each week in southern Iraq because Britain has withdrawn all its troops from population centers. Killings declined in Baghdad because a rigid separation of Sunnis and Shiites took place before the influx of U.S. troops. During the first months of 2007 Baghdad changed from 65% Shiite to 75% as a result of "ethnic cleansing" by Shiite militias.

Most important, violence is down because Washington has decided to leave a lot of the insurgents alone or simply buy them off. U.S. troops used to raid insurgent strongholds all the

time. That meant home invasions and shootings by nervous U.S. soldiers. It meant gun fights when these assaults were resisted by ordinary Iraqi families as well as guerrilla fighters. These often triggered U.S. artillery and air assaults that destroyed buildings and even whole blocks.

During the surge the U.S. has stopped doing as many raids. Instead, the U.S. military is paying anti-U.S. Sunni fighters to police their own neighborhoods – which they were doing before the surge anyway. They also pay them to fight against Al-Qaeda-linked groups that target civilians with spectacular bombings – which they were also already doing. These Sunni fighters in the so-called "Awakening Councils" haven't stopped opposing the U.S. presence. They just take U.S. money and wait, ambushing U.S. soldiers when the opportunity is there.

Has Life for Iraqis Gotten Better?

The majority of Iraqis don't like foreign soldiers in their country and support attacks on U.S. troops. They believe that the U.S. military makes their lives worse, not better. Nearly 8 million Iraqis – one-third of the population – are in need of humanitarian aid. Only a third of Iraqis can access safe drinking water. The sewage system has collapsed. UNICEF estimates that 4.5 million Iraqi children are under-nourished.

The reconstruction effort promised by the U.S. has all but collapsed (with tens of millions of dollars lost to corruption and war profiteering). The condition of Iraqi women – supposedly one

of the reasons Bush wanted to "liberate" Iraq – is worse than before the surge or the U.S. invasion.

According to U.N. data, over 700,000 residents of Baghdad – more than 10% of the population – fled the city during 2007. A few are returning – but only because neighboring countries can't handle any more refugees and are sending Iraqis back home. Some 2 million Iraqis are refugees in neighboring countries and more than 2 million more are displaced within Iraq.

No wonder every survey shows that more Iraqis than ever want to the U.S. to leave.

What About Political Reconciliation?

Bush's original selling-point for the surge was that it was supposed to provide security so various Iraqi factions could resolve their differences. It hasn't happened. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has lost the support of the Sunni Arabs in Parliament. The Sunnis in his cabinet have resigned, protesting ethnic cleansing and U.S. occupation.

The new Iraqi law that Bush just hailed as a breakthrough in national reconciliation is a fraud. U.S. and Iraqi officials admitted it might lead to more Sunnis losing government jobs than gaining them. It is denounced by the people Bush says will benefit.

What's Happening in the Region?

The surge has made everything worse throughout the Middle East. It has reinforced U.S. reliance on military action instead of diplomacy to solve problems. With the U.S. presence in Iraq opposed by big majorities in all Arab and Muslim countries, it has led the Bush administration to tighten links with unpopular dictators. Nuclear-armed Pakistan is now engulfed in daily violence and is more anti-U.S. than ever. War threatens to

break out on the border between Turkey and the northern, Kurdish portion of Iraq.

Bush tries to solve these and other issues by threatening Iran. But even U.S. allies in the region won't go along: after Bush's recent trip, the Arab News called his "saber rattling" "sad, even depressing."

Endless Surge or Stop the War Now?

The surge is a success in only one way. The notion that the surge strategy is working has shifted debate in the U.S. away from its pre-surge focus on how big a disaster the whole Iraq war is. It's taken the \$2 billion to \$3 billion per week cost of the war off the front pages. It's pushed coverage of U.S. casualties – now standing at almost 4,000 dead and 30,000 wounded – to the background.

To Bush's delight, the surge has "worked" in re-selling the Iraq war to the media. But it's a failure for the people of Iraq and the U.S.

What's needed instead is a renewed surge of voices from the grassroots:

***End the War Now,
Bring All the Troops Home.***

This flyer was prepared by United for Peace and Justice with the help of *War Times/Tiempo de Guerras*, a member group of UFPJ.

To learn more about what you can do to help end the war in Iraq, visit www.unitedforpeace.org and www.war-times.org

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