

COMMENT

PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

IN 2003, WHEN THE BUSH administration invaded Iraq, the Pentagon already had on its drawing boards plans for building a series of permanent mega-bases in that country. (They were charmingly called "enduring camps"). Once Baghdad fell and it turned out that, Saddam Hussein or no, the US was going to have to fight rather than settle in and let the good times roll, hundreds of micro-bases were added to the mega ones—106 of them by 2005, more than 300 in all. Then, in 2005, Washington decided to trade in its embassy in one of Saddam's old palaces for something a little spiffier. In its place, on a 104-acre plot by the Tigris River in the middle of Baghdad, for at least three-quarters of a billion dollars after cost overruns, it built the largest, most expensive embassy on the planet. It was planned for a staff of 1,000 "diplomats" with all the accoutrements of the good life and plenty of hired help. (Even now, despite much discussion about "ending" the American role in Iraq, further plans are reportedly being made for the embassy's staff to double.) This was clearly to be US mission control for the Greater Middle East.

Building of this expansive kind is, of course, a staggering imperial undertaking. It implies a global power with resources beyond measure, for which waste means nothing. The mega-bases and the embassy were, in that sense, American wonders of the world. No empire had ever launched a base-building programme quite like it.

The Iraqi base-building project did look like a one-of-a-kind architectural adventure—until, that is, the "forgotten war," the one in Afghanistan, came back into view. Starting in 2008, base building ramped up there, went into overdrive in 2009, and hasn't come out of it yet. The result : an even more staggering base-construction splurge, and with it, the announcement last year that another monster embassy would go up, this time in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, for another cool near-billion. (The already large US embassy in the Afghan capital, Kabul, would also be further expanded to the tune of \$175-200 million). And none of this even includes the huge ring of supporting bases for America's Afghan and Iraq operations in the Persian Gulf, South and Central Asia, and even on the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

The American military must be the heaviest occupation force in history. According to reports, it now has 1.5 million pieces of equipment, micro to mega, to get out of Iraq as US forces draw down.

After Afghanistan, America is now looking for Yemen to establish more military bases in the region.

The phantom terrorist group—al Qaeda—always pops up where popular movements give trouble to governments supported by the US. That's what is happening now in Yemen. And Yemen will soon be dotted with permanent military bases to protect 'Democracy'. □□□

[contributed]