



Washington's Wars and Occupations Month in Review #64

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SHAPE-SHIFTER: THE MANY FACES OF U.S. MILITARISM

Countless monsters lurk in the shadows of the U.S. empire. But U.S. militarism may be the biggest, most elusive, of them all – a shape-shifter. The nature of a shape-shifter is to be unreachable, unknowable, to change its way of being in order to accomplish its own goals, its own missions. While vampires, werewolves, and shape-shifters fill the collective pop-culture consciousness in shows like *Twilight* or *True Blood*, there is a real-life shape-shifter playing out its bloody agenda across the globe. Shape-shifting U.S. militarism maneuvers to keep its opponents and victims guessing, to occupy our attention in one direction while executing a different tactic in another part of the world.

U.S. combat operations are supposedly over in Iraq – but U.S. casualties in Afghanistan under Obama have now surpassed those under Bush and continue to climb. A majority of U.S. people think that war is not worth fighting, but General David Petraeus is leading other senior military commanders in a campaign to undermine Obama's July 2011 timeline for U.S. troops to "begin leaving" Afghanistan. In the last month, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger sent National Guard Troops to the U.S./Mexico border saying that the troops will help protect the American people. Military recruiters still target youth in people of color and poor communities: amid today's "jobless recovery" the U.S. military is the biggest jobs program going. A generation of veterans and active duty servicewomen and men, their families and friends, have sacrificed and paid too high a price for the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. And while the drawdown of troops in Iraq makes the front pages, there is an unpublicized military build-up of another kind on a small island in the Pacific far from the Middle East.

COMBAT TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ: REALLY?

The Iraq drawdown results from a timetable set by the Obama administration to withdraw combat troops by August 31. The last combat brigade crossing the border into Kuwait was big news for the mainstream press August 19. But there is more to the story. Does this mean an end to the seven-year-long illegal Iraq occupation? Is this a victory for peace? Unfortunately, it's not at all simple.

The shape-shifter is changing the way the Iraq occupation is enforced. Fifty thousand U.S. troops will remain, working with a large-scale build-up of private contractors brought in by the State Department to support the military. The remaining troops are a "transitional force" with, according to Obama, a "focused mission – supporting and training Iraqi forces, partnering with Iraqis in counterterrorism missions, and protecting our civilian and military efforts."

Juan Cole says the mission in Iraq has shifted from "Shock & Awe" to "Advise & Assist." The troops remaining in Iraq, he elaborates, "include special operations units, helicopter gunship crews, and other war fighters who are still going to be engaged in combat but will not be categorized as being in Iraq for that purpose."

Tom Hayden expanded on the nature of the civilian build-up: "Thousands of military contractors will conduct Iraqi police training, protect Iraq's airspace, and possibly conduct continued counterterrorism operations. State Department operatives will be protected in mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles [MRAPS], armored vehicles, helicopters, and its own planes." How independent and sovereign can Iraq really be with such a huge U.S. military presence? And U.S. generals hint that "if the Iraqis request it" thousands of troops will stay after the end-of-2011 deadline for all to be gone.

SHAPE-SHIFTING WAYS: SAME STORY, DIFFERENT SCRIPT

The drawdown is an attempt to signal a shift from the Bush/Neocon agenda of "preemptive war" justified by lies, fear-mongering and defiance of international law. The Neocons definitely don't like it. But we still see the demonization of "other" communities inside and outside U.S. borders, with anti-Muslim tirades and campaigns at fever pitch. From Arizona to Afghanistan U.S. militarism still operates with a framework of shoot it, fence it in, control it somehow with force – and lots of it.

The loss of life on all sides will continue. The occupation of Iraq has claimed over 4,400 U.S. troops' lives, wounded thousands physically and psychologically, and left millions of Iraqis killed, wounded, or displaced. Three days after the last U.S. troops designated as combat units left on August 19, another U.S. soldier was killed. The military announced that the soldier was killed in "a hostile attack" (isn't that combat?) in the province around Basra.

Life in Iraq: the middle class has disappeared, medical care is difficult to attain, there is no government five months after national elections, foreign troops are still there. People have protested and rioted in recent weeks over lack of electricity and other basic services. Juan Cole added it up: "The U.S. has done enough damage, and can best help Iraqis by allowing them to return to being an independent country."

AFGHANISTAN: OPERATION ENDURING CASUALTIES

As Operation Enduring Freedom moves into its tenth year, Obama's surge continues its devastating impacts on Afghan civilians and U.S. troops. U.S. troops have suffered more than 1,100 fatalities in Afghanistan since fighting began in October 2001, including a monthly record of 66 this past July. Seven more U.S. deaths were announced just yesterday.

Obama has set a July 2011 timetable for U.S. troops to begin leaving the country, but even this loophole-filled target is too restrictive for the military brass. Gen. David Petraeus and senior military officials like Marine Commandant Gen. James Conway have begun a political and media campaign to undermine the White House, arguing that the U.S. is in the "early stages" of a counterinsurgency campaign. In a press conference last week, Gen. Conway said, "In some ways ... [Obama's timetable] is probably giving our enemy sustenance... We think he may be saying to himself... 'Hey, you know, we only have to hold out for so long.'" Gen. Conway continued, "I honestly think it will be a few years before conditions on the ground are such that turnover will be possible for us."

The latest polls show 60% of the U.S. people opposed to the war. We see what Gen. Petraeus and the hawks don't want us to: things are only getting worse, and U.S. troops need to come home now.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE: U.S. IS NO HONEST BROKER

Regarding Israel/Palestine, the shape shift now is the beginning of “direct talks.” On August 20, the Obama administration announced that it will host face-to-face Israeli-Palestinian peace talks beginning on September 2 in Washington, D.C. No honest broker for the negotiations, Washington has spent the last several decades arming and funding the Israeli military as it grabs Palestinian land and enforces an apartheid-type arrangement on the Palestinian people. And it continues to do so: according to the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, “The U.S. is scheduled to provide Israel with \$30 billion in weapons from 2009–2018. The U.S. cannot credibly broker Israeli-Palestinian peace while bankrolling Israel’s military machine and simultaneously ignoring Israel’s human rights violations.”

Even before talks begin, a crisis for them looms. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told his right-wing party August 29 that he has made no promises to anyone to continue the partial moratorium on settlement-building. Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas had declared when he agreed to direct talks that if settlement building officially resumed (it never really stopped) it meant negotiations would end.

THE PEACE MOVEMENT: SHIFTING OUR TACTICS

The antiwar movement no longer has one single, illegal war as the over-riding focus of our efforts. The Bush administration swung so far to the right that it was easy to target and “other” his administration and the Republican Party. The shape-shifting nature of U.S. militarism is a challenge to our strategies. Our attention has to include many issues in many different communities and many different crisis-points, as the U.S. military maintains over 700 military bases and installations world-wide.

Now we have Obama, the first Black President. Someone who became so human to all of us in the anti-war movement, partly because of the great obstacles he had to surmount to get to the White House, partly because with his promise to end the war in Iraq we finally had a candidate “on our side.” But U.S. militarism is bigger than Bush, bigger than Obama. Its shape is changing again: so must the shape of our resistance. U.S. militarism’s shape-shifting ways were born at the dawn of the U.S. over 200 years ago, and have a long and twisted history staking out and protecting U.S. interests around the world.

STRATEGIC REGION: THE PACIFIC

As global economic clout shifts to Asia, the guardians of U.S. power are increasingly concerned about their interests in the Pacific region. That’s the context for the big buildup the Pentagon is planning for the tiny island of Guahan (Guam), which will bring an estimated 8–10,000 additional Marines (mostly combat troops) and their dependents onto the island.

Known as the “tip of the spear,” Guahan is strategically positioned in the Pacific Basin. Like Japan, the Philippines, Okinawa, and South Korea, Guahan is used by the U.S. military to train and maintain wartime fighting capabilities and to project military might against potential rivals, especially China. But the residents of Guahan are getting organized and fighting back, making the U.S. military nervous that grassroots opposition will undermine their empire-building project.

Guahan has been an unincorporated territory of the U.S. since 1944. Though technically U.S. citizens, the residents of Guahan are unable to vote for President, unable to select Congressional representatives who have voting power, unable to determine their future on their own terms. Under colonial status for nearly 340 years, on Guahan the U.S. military enjoys some support from residents who see the U.S. as a liberating force from the islands’ earlier conquerors, and

who depend on the military's activities for their economic survival. Currently the military owns more than 30% of the 212-square-mile island.

But as in many other military communities, the local government strategy of trying to use the military presence and infrastructure building for economic development often has the opposite effect. Nearly one-third of Guahan's population receives food stamps. Twenty-five percent live below the federal poverty line. Chamorros (the indigenous residents of Guahan) lead all U.S. demographic groups in the number of U.S. troops killed per capita and in their rate of military recruitment. Guam is also home to over 100 toxic sites and 12 Superfund sites, a direct result of the U.S. military presence.

SHAPE-SHIFTING, PACIFIC VERSION

The Bush administration, under growing pressure from a Japanese government besieged by popular protests over military presence in that country, negotiated a complicated bilateral agreement of \$13 billion dollars with Japan. Under this agreement, the U.S. Marines would acquire an additional 40% of Guahan's lands, and relocate between 8,000 and 10,000 armed personnel from Okinawa, Japan to Guahan. This move would increase Guahan's population by 45% over the next four years. Additionally, the buildup would require that 71 acres of vibrant coral reef be destroyed to make way for a transient nuclear carrier.

The U.S. military uses its Pacific bases to provide logistical support for missions around the world. From its numerous bases there, the military is able to supply itself, restock, and conduct repair and maintenance of military platforms and equipment. Currently Guahan is home to the Anderson Air Force base, which is capable of handling the largest U.S. aircraft in history, and the ability to acquire more assets if necessary. U.S. bases on Guahan already handle nuclear powered attack submarines, F-22 fighter jets, and B-2 stealth bombers.

Guahan's strategic location relative to China, North Korea, Russia, Japan, and Vietnam makes it a prime spot for the U.S. to prepare for military aggression. North Korea is the most likely immediate target; China is regarded as the main long-range "threat."

A key reason for the buildup in Guahan is that U.S. military presence in Okinawa has been contested, with mass popular protests calling for the ousting of the U.S. military, based on widespread reports of rape of women and young girls and other crimes committed by military personnel stationed there, as well as the infrastructure costs of hosting nearly 150,000 US troops in total. Since Guahan is a U.S. colony, unlike Japan or other Pacific nations, it does not have a democratic voice within this process.

"WE ARE GUAHAN" FIGHTS BACK

The U.S. military wants everyone to believe that there is popular support for the buildup that threatens the island. However, a Draft Environmental Impact Study (EIS) released by the military in November 2009 was given the lowest possible rating by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA identified a host of concerns with the plans for buildup, including but not limited to taxing local infrastructure that would put public health at serious risk. The EPA says that with a 45% increase in population, Guahan's infrastructure would be significantly taxed – enough to overwhelm Guahan's aging water treatment systems and limit access to water by thousands of low income residents. The EPA states that the damage to the coral reef would significantly and irreparably alter Guahan's ecosystems.

In addition to logistical and environmental concerns, popular forces have organized in opposition to the military buildup and in support of self-determination for the island and its residents, and all other communities impacted by military occupation and violence. We Are Guahan

(www.weareguahan.com) is a grassroots organization that has begun to organize residents of Guahan and beyond to oppose the military buildup using a combination of popular education, cultural awareness, and intergenerational and multiracial / multiethnic alliances.

As the empire tries to gain approval of this massive project, We Are Guahan is exposing the contradictions of moving U.S. Marines unwanted in Okinawa to another location where residents oppose the military's presence. Last week, organizers surprised a formal tour organized by the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense by staging a community cleanup that also demonstrated to community members exactly how much of an ancestral burial ground would be taken and used for a military firing range. Indeed, the buildup is a threat to the very existence of the indigenous people of Guahan. Less than 40% of the current population is Chamorro, and it is estimated that within the next 30 years the Chamorro language could become extinct.

A CALL TO THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

On September 8, the U.S. military will issue a Record of Decision on the pending Environmental Impact Study (EIS). This date is an opportunity for the antiwar movement to act in solidarity with the people of Guahan who are resisting military buildup, and organizers for We Are Guahan are actively seeking stateside alliances. As anti-military sentiment grows on the island, people in the U.S. can lend our support by calling our representatives and telling them that we want to move the money from militarization and war preparations to education, health care, and infrastructure.

From tiny Guahan to front-page news Afghanistan, the shape-shifting U.S. military is maneuvering to get its way. The antiwar movement's challenge is to keep our eyes and ears open, to read between the lines, to see the links between these many faces of the shape-shifter. We have to look for the places where our struggles overlap, and illuminate those links to build solutions together.

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