

Rifts in NATO Complicate U.S. Military Occupations

On the eve of the 2008 NATO summit, Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said an additional 7,500 soldiers and 3,000 military trainers needed to be sent immediately to Afghanistan.

Some 59,000 troops from 39 countries are occupying Afghanistan at the present, including 19,000 U.S. soldiers. Of this number, 47,500 are under NATO command.

As their mission has faltered and Afghan resistance has grown, internal rifts in the NATO alliance are being aired publicly. Disagreements over burden sharing, coordination and strategic direction are plaguing the alliance. Canada threatened to pull out of Afghanistan if other countries did not send substantially more troops. Germany has refused to expand its existing force of 3,200.

The Bush administration had no realistic hope of getting the NATO allies to send large additional numbers. Yet the Pentagon is so over-stretched in Iraq that it cannot provide them itself. Bush's message — "We expect our NATO allies to shoulder the burden necessary to succeed" — was hardly popular or winning.

Under pressure during the meetings, President Nicholas Sarkozy grandly said France would deploy an additional 1,000 troops. The French Parliament immediately cut this number down to 700. Poland agreed to send another 400 troops. Romania, Spain and Britain pledged to boost their numbers by a

few hundred each. But the immediate goal of 10,000 additional troops was not even close.

Shrinking coalition in Iraq

Former prime ministers Tony Blair of Britain, John Howard of Australia, Jose Maria Aznar of Spain, and Silvio Berlusconi of Italy lost their elected positions due to the enormously unpopular commitment of troops to Iraq and their support of the war. It is now considered political suicide in Western Europe for politicians to increase their troop commitment in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Every battle in both Iraq and Afghanistan confirms that while the U.S./NATO forces may prevail over local resistance forces by the use of overwhelming military power and indiscriminate bombing, they succeed only in increasing the size of the resistance and recruiting more insurgents. Sending more troops only exacerbates the problem.

The small, dependent new members of NATO, being pressed on every side to send ever more soldiers as cannon fodder to Afghanistan, Iraq and other missions, get confused on the command structures. Romanian President Traian Basescu referred to his country's troops in Iraq as NATO forces at a press conference on April 8, 2008. He was publicly corrected with the explanation that NATO does not have a mission in Iraq, where Romanian troops are part of the "International Coalition." The mission is the same — securing an imperialist occupation. Only the name is different.

As other imperialist forces — such as Britain, Spain, Italy, Australia, and Japan — withdraw from Iraq, the shrinking "International Coalition" is carried by ground forces from poorer countries like El Salvador and Tonga, as well as many once part of or allied to the Soviet Union, like Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia.

The number of non-U.S. troops in Iraq was down from 23,000 in 2003 to less than 10,000 in 2008, and shrinking.

The costs incurred by 20 of the poorer countries are paid by U.S. taxpayers. The cost of more than 160,000 U.S. troops and 100,000 private contractors in Iraq is also paid by the taxes and budget cuts plaguing poor and working people in the U.S.

Seeds of NATO's defeat

NATO is first and foremost a military alliance. Therein lie the seeds of its defeat. Every battle in both Iraq and Afghanistan confirms that while the U.S./NATO forces may prevail over local resistance forces by the use of overwhelming military power and indiscriminate bombing, they succeed only in increasing the size of the resistance and recruiting more insurgents. Sending more troops only exacerbates the problem.

U.S. imperialism is facing an unsolvable contradiction. The political movement must be on the alert. These contradictions can make the billionaire rulers more desperate and more dangerous. As their world economic position slips, along with the almighty U.S. dollar, they are increasingly attracted to military solutions. But maintaining the weapons, bases and troops sucks up an ever-greater share of resources.

Militarism is both a life-sustaining corporate subsidy and an endless drain on the economy as a whole.

With each passing day the cost of endless wars of occupation is becoming clearer and less acceptable to millions of poor and working people in the U.S. and across Europe.

U.S. War – Profitable But Unwinnable

Increasing economic hardships, budget cuts and military casualties are undermining this grand military alliance. NATO is crumbling from below, even as it expands numerically and geographically.

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Banner of the U.S. Chapter of the International League of Peoples Struggle. Chicago, May 20, 2012.