

CONSCRIPTION & CONSCIENCE UPDATE #6

14 September 2005

Dear Family & Friends,

This update seems to be more of the same. However, there are ongoing developments and intensifying activity which I will try to outline. It behooves a conscientious objector to be conversantly familiar with the military activities that are taking place.

One other thing that has come up since the last update is the “I Will Not Kill” pledge sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation. I strongly recommend that you check into it at <http://www.iwillnotkill.org>. The pledge can be downloaded and sent to FOR by US Postal Service or you can make the pledge on-line. It will be kept in FOR’s registry of conscientious objectors. Having this on file will be valuable if some day you have to prove that you object to war. **BE SURE TO KEEP A COPY OF EVERYTHING** – pledge, correspondence, notes, etc. – in you personal CO file.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* noted on August 14th that “Pacifist churches are organizing for resistance – the May issue of *Quaker Life* advised readers to lay the foundation for conscientious objector status by participating in church and peace events. ... [Nodraftnoway.org](http://nodraftnoway.org) lists the draft threat as ‘elevated,’ noting: ‘Reinstatement of the draft is likely soon, despite what politicians claim. We must begin building a movement now to stop it!’”

Again, I hope this update will be helpful.

Love to all of you,

Bob/Dad/Grampa

STUCK IN IRAQ

I consider the situation in Iraq as directly affecting whether or not there will be a draft in the near future. Occupying Iraq is straining the military personnel strengths. It is not just the 138,000 US troops there at present, but the continual rotation that is taking the toll. People who for various personal reasons have signed up in the Army (regular, reserve, or national guard) and Marines (regular or reserve) now face a very different situation than they expected at the time of enlistment. Even a one-year stint in Iraq raises havoc with a person’s life – employment, family, psychological effects, etc – providing he or she is not killed or wounded. But facing continual rotations essentially cancels any hope for a decent career. This has hurt the recruiting of replacements, which will be discussed below. But, regarding Iraq, the situation there is not hopeful. Terrorism and militia intimidation are escalating, the formation of a responsible Iraqi government has stagnated, and the conflicting estimates of troop numbers required indicates disunity and disorganization in the Bush administration.

Escalating Terrorist and Militia Violence.

The August combat death toll of 74 US troops is the highest this year and the third highest since the war began. (The two months that were higher were April 2004 and November 2004 in which the US launched full-scale attacks against Al-Fallujah.) Attacks on US convoys with roadside bombs have doubled over the last year. Killing members of Iraq's security forces has tripled since January and an estimated 4,000 civilians have been killed in Baghdad since April 28th. A series of bombings and rocket attacks in Baghdad today (September 14th) killed at least 141 people. Al-Qaida in Iraq claimed responsibility and said a series of suicide bombings were in retaliation for US attack on Tall Afar.

Sunni Insurgents continue to dominate most of the towns bordering the Euphrates River, such as Al-Qaim, Al-Hadithah, Al-Haglaniyah, Hit, Ar-Ramandi, and Al-Fallujah which are all in Iraq's largest province of Al-Anbar, the center of guerrilla resistance. But getting to them is like trying to manacle an octopus with a single pair of handcuffs – when a cuff is moved to another tentacle the one just released swings into action. Likewise, the guerrillas pull out when the US attacks and then come back in later. Lt. Col. Tim Mundy in Al-Qaim said: “It doesn't do much good to push them out of these areas only to let them go back to areas we've already cleared. ... We go back to camp and then we get reports that they've come back in.” Marine Colonel Stephen Davis says “I don't think of this in terms of winning” but as a war of attrition. He says he expects the insurgency to last for years. Al-Anbar Province is the strategic center of the country and must be controlled for a functioning Iraqi democracy to be possible.

Al-Qaida in Iraq, led by Jordanian Abu Musab Zarqawi, is anti-government and anti-US. It is made up of both Iraqis and foreign fighters. Early this month (September) they wrested control of large sections of Al-Qaim, a key border town about 200 miles west of Baghdad but only two miles from the Syrian border. Officials and supporters of the new Iraqi government have been executed. Strict Islamic law has been set up in the occupied area and residents are fleeing the city. US Marines are outside the city but do not have enough forces to confront Al-Qaida of Iraq. On September 5th, Al-Qaida of Iraq also made a daylight attack on the Interior Ministry in Baghdad – the ministry which controls Iraqi police forces and paramilitaries.

Shiite and Kurdish Militias are on the pro-government side, but they are illegal. They seem to be a shadow force for the Iraqi security forces which carry out extra-legal activities such as abductions, assassinations and other acts to intimidate the anti-government population. Although pro-government, they operate on their own authority to create a climate of fear and are not accountable to any elected officials. As the *Washington Post* Foreign Service states it: “Their growing authority has enabled them to control territory, confront their perceived enemies and provide patronage to their followers.”

Whereas the Sunni insurgency and Al-Qaida in Iraq operate in the center of the country dominated by Sunnis, these militias are consolidated in the Shiite south and the Kurdish north. They are centered in the cities of Basra (Shiite) and Mosul (Kurdish).

Although these militias do operate independently on their own, they sometimes seem to overlap or have some connection with the Iraqi police force that is funded and trained by the US. The US denies any role in supporting these militias.

In Basra, Iraq's second largest city of 1.5 million, there have been about 65 assassinations since May. It has been reported that some were carried out by men wearing police uniforms and driving police vehicles. The provincial governor admits the Shiite militia has penetrated the police force and another official estimates that as much as 90% of the local police force of 13,600 could belong to the militia. Basra police chief, Hassan Sawadi, claims to have lost control over 75% of his force and that militiamen are using their positions to assassinate opponents. Shortly after that the Interior Ministry ordered Sawadi not to speak in public.

In the northern part of the country, centered in Mosul, Iraq's third largest city with a population of one million, Kurdish militiamen have picked up hundreds of opponents during raids and off the streets and jailed them in a system of secret detention centers. Government and political leaders who threaten Kurdish interests have been intimidated and beat up.

When the 7,000-man Mosul police force collapsed last November, Kurdish fighters entered the picture. They now dominate the Iraqi Army in that region with four Kurdish battalions. Consequently, these militias have been described as operating nominally under the US-backed Iraqi Army. The militiamen further claim that their network of secret detentions centers were initiated by the Iraqi government with the OK from the US military.

[The UN's bi-monthly human rights report](#), released September 8th, sounded the alarm on mounting violence throughout Iraq and blamed pro-government militias for torture in police stations and extrajudicial executions. The report stated: "Corpses appear regularly in and around Baghdad and other areas. Most show signs of torture and appear to be victims of extrajudicial executions." The report noted that some incidents were reported after the victim having been arrested by security forces under the Ministry of Interior, and continued: "Serious allegations of extrajudicial executions ... underline a deterioration in the situation of law and order." Anti-government Sunni insurgents are also accused of mass killings of both civilians and security personnel.

A Stalled Constitution.

It is difficult to follow and understand the process in drafting the Iraqi constitution. The August 15th deadline (discussed in the last update) was presented as absolutely critical to meet in order to accommodate the US schedule for elections and possible withdrawal of troop. But it slipped by and another deadline was set for a week later. Finally, ten days later, on August 25th, amid much media fanfare, a draft constitution was presented to parliament. Then it was reported that parliament accepted the constitution on August 28th. Subsequent discussion revealed that some articles were still being debated and that negotiations were far from over. That was followed by announcements of compromise and it now appears that a referendum on the constitution will take place in October followed by a parliamentary election on December 15th.

But has it really been accepted? Sunni negotiators on the drafting committee have rejected certain provisions and threaten to defeat it in the referendum. If two-thirds of the vote in just three of Iraq's provinces reject the constitution in the October referendum, the document is dead (the anti-constitution Sunnis have a majority in four provinces).

Another diversion tactic is that PR releases have steered the media toward the religious debate – Shia law vs. democratic vote, and whether the constitution would relegate legislation to the Koran. Very little has been said in the American media about economic and social guarantees in the constitution, and those are contested as well in Iraq. Herbert Docena of the *Asia Times* has published a long and informative analysis of how the current draft constitution evolved. I will recap it briefly here from *Asia Times* and other papers without going into all the behind-the-scenes manipulation by US officials.

After Iraq was conquered, the US set up a provisional government of people it chose and those people enacted laws the US wanted. Then an elected government took over and a committee was appointed to draft a constitution. The first draft that became public last June 30th practically upset the entire structure of law set up under the provisional government. It declared that all resources, including oil, would be owned collectively by the Iraqi people and be used to provide every one of them with an education, health care, housing and other social services. The draft declared that “Social justice is the basis of building society.” It also stated that work is the right and duty of every citizen and that the state is responsible for providing work or pay each person a salary if there is good reason they cannot work.

Then the US influence went to work. In a July 20th draft the social justice provisions disappeared. People could not be prevented from using their property “except within the boundaries of the law.” Education and social services were guaranteed “within the limits of their resources.” The right to private ownership was guaranteed “without limitation.”

Then the final August 25th draft was introduced to parliament. It provided the right to own property “except what is exempted by law.” It provided work as a right and that government would regulate employee-employer relations on an economic basis while considering social justice. Education is a right regulated by the state as is health care. Individuals and associations can build hospitals, dispensaries, and private clinics under state supervision. There were articles committing the state to fighting terrorism and guaranteeing free trade among provinces and regions. Oil and gas were declared the property of the Iraqi people but the federal government along with the producing provinces will decide on how they should be developed, using “the most modern techniques of market principles and encouraging investment.”

Those economic and social aspects of the constitution, along with provisions for Islamic law, make the constitution unacceptable to many. On the other hand, rejecting it could very well be a formula for civil war.

Vacillating Reports of Troops Needed.

There are currently about 138,000 US troops in Iraq (including about 25,000 Marines). These, together with troops from other nations, add up to some 160,000 total foreign troops in that country. This war is now costing America \$6 billion a month, mainly because of the Pentagon’s reliance on expensive private contractors for tasks such as security.

In the last Update I reported that Lt. Gen. John R. Vines, who runs the day-to-day multinational military operations in Iraq, said last June that a reduction of 20,000 US troops is possible next year. Then on 27 July 2005, General George Casey (top US commander in Iraq) said a considerable

drawdown of forces could start next year under the right conditions: that Iraq's political process (drafting a constitution and national elections) remain on track and that the terrorist insurgency didn't grow.

Since then, the top American commander in the Middle East, General John P. Abizaid, head of the Pentagon's Central Command, presented a plan to gradually reduce US forces by maybe 20,000 to 30,000 troops by next spring **if conditions on the ground permitted**. But at the same time he also warned that US troop levels may have to be maintained through 2006.

All of this optimistic news came to an abrupt end when on August 11th President Bush dismissed the statements of his top generals as "speculation." He stated: "The decision finally will be made by me – upon the recommendation of Gen. Casey through Secretary Rumsfeld to me."

So much for hopes of troop withdrawal. Then, as if to pound the final nail in the coffin of optimism, General Peter Schoomaker, Army chief of staff, announced on August 20th that the army is planning for four more years in Iraq. Lt. Gen. James Lovelace, the Army's deputy chief of staff, told FOX News that the Army will be able to keep 100,000 troops in Iraq for the next four years. But there was a catch. To do this, Lovelace said, some troops would have to go through three or four rotations – three or four years of duty in Iraq.

Rather than reduce troops, it looks like an increase of troops is taking place. The first category of increase is supposed to be temporary during the October constitutional referendum and the December 15th parliamentary election. This increase was announced in late August to be some 20,000 troops to bring the total to almost 160,000. (A temporary increase of this nature took place during Iraq's presidential election last January.) This is to be accomplished by overlapping rotation periods, which means some soldiers will have to serve more than a year on their rotation.

In the wake of the troop shortage experienced during Hurricane Katrina, Lt. Gen. John Vines told reporters on September 2nd that troops would be built to about 140,000 during the elections. That would only be an increase of 2,000 instead of 20,000. It may be possible that Vines mis-spoke, or was misunderstood, but I have seen no correction. It was reported, however, that a senior military spokesman in Iraq had no explanation for the lower number.

That may be only a temporary increase during elections, but there seems to be another increase of a more permanent nature. Requests have been made for a permanent increase of 700 troops to help manage the rising number of detainees. US military detention centers in Iraq now hold over 10,800 prisoners, compared to 5,400 in September of last year.

RECRUITING PROBLEMS & PRACTICES

Recruiting and reenlisting are needed to maintain the required military personnel levels. If those levels are not maintained at a functional level, the possibility of a draft looms closer.

There are not a lot of details on how well recruiting goals have been achieved recently. During his August 11th speech, Bush said that all active-duty branches would meet their reenlistment goals this year and that the Army met its July goal for new active-duty recruits. This statement is deceptive

because he is mixing apples and oranges – reenlistment goals and recruiting goals – and he mentions nothing about the National Guard or Reserves. Neither did he mention that Army officials, in spite of meeting their July recruitment target, do not expect to meet their annual recruitment goals this year. Bush just picked what served his purpose from the entire recruitment/reenlistment picture and ignored the rest.

Here is what has been published:

- **Reenlistment** – annual reenlistment goals for the Regular Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserves have all been met or exceeded (107% for the Regular Army). Reenlistment goals for the other military branches have also been met.
- **Recruiting** – actual recruiting has fallen short of the yearly goals for the Regular Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserves.
- There seems to be no recent information available for the Marines.

As for the future, General Peter Schoomaker, Army chief of staff, said that next year “may be the toughest recruiting environment yet.” Against that backdrop, moderate democrats in the legislature have introduced a bill to increase the Army’s size by 80,000 troops over four years.

RISING OPPOSITION TO IRAQ WAR

Some hope may be gleaned from the stiffening of resistance to American troops being in Iraq. One form of objection has been state governors and other state officials complaining that their state’s National Guard forces have been so depleted that response to a major natural disaster, such as a forest fire or hurricane, would be severely hampered. Lt. Col. Pete Schneider of the Louisiana National Guard was one. In October 2004, the Louisiana National Guard went to Iraq taking with them vital equipment such as high-water vehicles, humvees, refuellers, and generators. On the first of last month (August 1st), Schneider said: “The National Guard needs that equipment back home to support the homeland security mission.” He said they have enough to get by and that if they were hit by a hurricane the neighboring states had agreed to help. But Schneider wasn’t thinking of the likes of Hurricane Katrina which hit about three weeks later. When the emergency created by that disaster dies down, especially in light of the federal government’s poor response, there will undoubtedly be stronger grounds for governors to demand that their National Guard return home.

Opposition to the US occupation of Iraq is also rising in the new Iraqi government. Yesterday (September 13th) Iraq’s National Sovereignty Committee, composed of 18 legislators elected last January, laid the legal groundwork for asking the US to withdraw its troops. It issued a 4-page report requesting that a timetable be set for withdrawing the “occupation forces” (the first time that term has been used in official circles). Two other requests in the report were (1) for the United Nations to pass a resolution recognizing Iraq as a sovereign country, and (2) to repeal an order by the US Coalition Provisional Authority which gives foreign nationals immunity from prosecution in Iraqi courts.

A month earlier (August 14th) it had become public knowledge that the Bush administration had significantly lowered its expectations for democracy in Iraq. Facing the crisis during the drafting of

Iraq's constitution, it became apparent that it was not possible to set up a true democracy in which the majority of the people would be free from serious security and economic risks and with a self-supporting oil industry.

Some of the other concessions the US has been forced to make are:

- Infrastructure will not be rebuilt as envisioned. (Many of Baghdad's 6-million population are without electricity for days in 120-degree weather. The water system, which has hundreds of thousands of leaks, is still polluted by raw sewage and requires electricity for pumping.)
- Iraq's constitution will require that civil laws comply with Islamic law – Iraq will be some form of Islamic republic.
- The rights of women will not be fully realized.
- It is not possible to forge national unity behind a constitution.
- The insurgency will not be fully defeated before America leaves.

These new occupation goals may be hopeful in getting troops out of Iraq sooner and forestalling the possibility of a draft. What it will mean for Iraq, however, is not so predictable and may not be so optimistic.

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