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# Surging towards the holy oil grail

ByPepe Escobar

**Schedule of impending disaster in Iraq according to the oil rights law (cf. Midnight Notes any time since 2003) about to be passed under cover of moral fever over the US cannon fodder 'surge'. From by-no-means-sympathetic perspective the speculator, sorry, journalist almost acknowledges a common class interest between insurgent Sunni and Shia non-oil-owners, against their 'representatives' including the newly-ministerial Badr Brigades as well as the ex-Ba'ath thanatocrats courted by the occupiers as potential deal-brokers.**

**From Asia Times: [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/IA12Ak05.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/IA12Ak05.html)**

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## **THE ROVING EYE**

### **Surging toward the holy oil grail**

By Pepe Escobar

*"I see the imminent death of 20,000 men,  
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,  
Go to their graves like beds ...  
O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth."*

**Hamlet**, Act IV; according to White House spin part of reading-adverse President George W Bush's book list during the summer of 2006.

And so, after a tsunami surge of spin, US President George W. Bush is heading toward escalation, summoning his 21,500 men, supported by barely 11% of Americans. Escalation in Iraq is the name of the president's game, and that also applies to Somalia - the new Afghanistan.

In far from accidental timing, the good old "war on terror" is back from the grave (nobody really related to the "long war" newspeak). After all, the galleries had to be reminded that there's a Pentagon-concocted "arc of instability" running from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East and then to the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Himalayas. The "war on terror" has expanded to the business of killing Africans, now afforded membership of the ever-expanding "axis of evil".

Bush, in front of a stack of books he never reads, blamed al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Sunni Arab resistance and "Shi'ites supported by Iran" for his failures; committed five more brigades to Baghdad and 4,000 extra troops to guerrilla and al-Qaeda-controlled al-Anbar province. As if these shock troops will be enough to pursue the "fight against terror". Bush's plan ultimately breaks down to a slightly bulkier US militia in Iraq capable of killing more Arabs.

### **Taking the bull by the Horn**

With some aplomb, the White House/Pentagon axis has managed to turn Somalia into the new Afghanistan, in more ways than one and just in time for Bush's announcement of his escalation-tainted "new way forward". The Pentagon maintained it had "credible" intelligence before it decided to strike alleged al-Qaeda-infested villages in southern Somalia. This is highly suspect.

The intelligence was provided by unsavory, corrupt Ethiopian dictator Meles Zenawi - who came up with the clever plot of concocting a fictitious jihad conducted by "neo-Taliban" in Somalia and selling it handsomely to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pentagon. He's now posing as a

prime US ally in the "war on terror", just as Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov did in the autumn of 2001.

Zenawi's US-trained Ethiopian troops, the ones who invaded Somalia, are infested with CIA operatives and Special Forces - all of them flown in from the strategic US-controlled (since September 11, 2003) Camp Le Monier in Djibouti.

Arab media are having a field day reporting that Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf, a reconverted warlord "elected" by fellow warlords (all armed by the US) and then legitimized by the United Nations, told African journalists in Mogadishu that the US had the right to bomb "anywhere in the world". According to the Kenyan newspaper The Daily Nation, this new US campaign of targeted assassinations has in fact killed scores of civilians.

But with the help of Ethiopia's dictatorship - whose soldiers it trained - Washington is being rewarded with one more client regime, and a crucial foothold in the Horn of Africa, right on the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, very close to the Red Sea and literally next door to Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Or is it that simple? Somalia, 75% pastoral with six major clans and hundreds of sub-clans, is now in civil-war mode. Millions of Somalis live in neighboring Kenya, and support the deposed, moderate Islamic Union Courts. Kenya will be convulsed. Blowback will be inevitable - and bloody. "Long war" marketers and profiteers could not but rejoice.

### **The bull in the carpet shop**

As the Somali Osama bin Laden slouches toward Kenya to be born, there is only one new Saddam Hussein strong enough to "save" the US in Iraq. His name is Abu Deraa. But there is a slight problem: he is a Shi'ite warlord, and head of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army.

The Iraqi media have been wildly speculating that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki could be the victim of a US-engineered white coup, the likely replacement candidates being two certified Washington puppets, current Vice President Adil Abdul Mahdi from the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an enthusiast of a proposed new Iraqi oil law, and former interim prime minister, former Ba'athist and "butcher of Fallujah", Iyad Allawi.

But just when Washington and the Green Zone in Baghdad were abuzz with talk of regime change, Bush told Republican senators this week that his escalation and "new way forward" policies were basically designed by none other than Maliki, widely condemned for his support of Shi'ite death squads. It is astonishing that Maliki might actually have managed to convince Bush that he will frontally take on the militias of his ally Muqtada.

High on the White House wishful-thinking list is that Muqtada be isolated in the Iraqi Parliament as the US-trained Iraqi army, on Maliki's orders and helped by the Pentagon, crushes the Mehdi Army. Shi'ites killing Shi'ites? Now that's an extremely tall order. Yet this would lead, runs the scenario, to the mollifying of the Sunni Arab resistance. Sunnis would increase their voice in the government - supposing they were convinced there would be no more militia-conducted ethnic cleansing. The scenario completely "forgets" the SCIRI's Badr Organization, whose militias, much more organized and well trained than the Mehdi Army, are operating right from inside the Interior Ministry.

Nothing of the White House's laundry list, of course, is going to

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happen. What could happen, though, is indiscriminate US-conducted civilian killings, thus generating another martyr, Muqtada, even more powerful for legions of Shi'ites than Saddam has become for Sunni Ba'athists.

The basic fact remains that Bush's escalation is designed to smash Muqtada's Mehdi Army. That can only mean, in practice, a mini-genocide of vast masses of unruly, extremely dispossessed Shi'ites: the coming battle of Sadr City, which the Pentagon has been itching to launch since the spring of 2004. The Pentagon is actually declaring war on no fewer than 2.2 million (poor) people. A sinister symmetry still applies: the Pentagon will attack dispossessed Shi'ite masses - just as the Israeli Defense Forces attacked dispossessed Shi'ite masses in southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006.

There's more. Bush's escalation, according to his own speech, will ensure there will actually be two major battles on two different fronts: the battle of Sadr City, against Shi'ites, and the Great Battle of Baghdad, as the Sunni Arab *muqawama* (resistance) has been dubbing it. A tangential taste of this second front was provided this week by the day-long fight in Haifa Street between coalition and Iraqi forces against militants.

Muhammad al-Askari, the military adviser to Maliki, justified the bombing of Haifa Street as crucial to the killing of "50 terrorists". Anyone familiar with the Sunni Arab resistance knows they would never be dumb enough to concentrate 50 top fighters in a single Baghdad street in full view of US firepower. The battle of Haifa Street actually fits into Maliki's preferred developing pattern: systematic ethnic cleansing of Sunni areas by the heavily militia-infiltrated, and US-trained, Iraqi army.

Bush's escalation is also certain to incinerate the stars of counterinsurgency ace Lieutenant-General David Petraeus, currently spun as the new military messiah who will "save" Iraq for the US. After all, he is the co-author of the new US Army counterinsurgency field manual. But according to Petraeus' own doctrine, the Pentagon would need at least 120,000 combat troops to have a shot at winning the counterinsurgency game in Baghdad. The US currently has no more than 70,000 combat troops in the whole of Iraq. It controls not even a hectare of al-Anbar province - which is practically on the way to becoming an Islamic emirate. The US controls the Green Zone - and that's it. So in essence Bush's 21,500 extra men are doomed to total irrelevance - not to mention raising their odds of returning home in a body bag, courtesy of the upcoming resistance surge.

### **Grabbing those oil fields by the horn**

Washington's successive divide-and-rule tactics - facilitating a possible genocide of Sunnis, contemplating a mass slaughter of Shi'ites, betting on a regional Sunni/Shi'ite war - never for a second lose sight of the riches of Iraqi. For Big Business, an Iraq eaten alive by Balkanization is the ideal environment for the triumph of Anglo-American petrocracy.

A new Iraqi oil law will most likely be voted on in Parliament in the next few weeks, before the arrival of Bush's 21,500 men, and it should be in effect in March. The law is Anglo-American Big Oil's holy grail: the draft has been carefully scrutinized by Washington, Big Oil and the International Monetary Fund, but not by Iraqi politicians. The profit-sharing agreements enshrined by the law are immensely profitable for Big Oil. And crucially, the law prevents any Iraqi government from nationalizing the oil industry - as the majority of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) member states did. In essence, it's a game of "if you nationalize, we invade you - again". So the law fulfills the early-2003 neo-con boast of "we are the new OPEC".

Iraq's petrodollars will turn to mush - or rather, as with Saudi Arabia, be recycled back to US banks. Security company Blackwater will make a killing "protecting" Iraqi pipelines. Bechtel and Halliburton will get myriad fat contracts to rebuild everything the US has bombarded since 1991.

But what's the use of an oil law in a 100-cadavers-a-day hellhole? Enter the escalation as a way of providing "stability". Whichever way the coming surge goes - ethnic cleansing of Sunnis, the battle of Sadr City - what matters is not the piling up of Arab Muslim (or American) bodies, but how much less cumbersome is the path toward the holy oil grail. Big Business will make a deal with anyone that facilitates the passing of the oil law, be it Maliki's Da'wa Party, the SCIRI, or - in a wildest-dream version - the Sadrists or al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The overwhelming majority of Iraqis, Sunni and Shi'ite, want the US out, and as soon as possible. A rape of Iraq's oil wealth enshrined by a Parliament-approved oil law would certainly lead to national unrest. For the moment it's fair to assume the US is taking no chances in its backroom deals, as the SCIRI's support for the new law, via Vice President Adil Abdul Mahdi, is practically assured. Da'wa must be in the process of being bribed to death.

But Muqtada is another story. He is close to some Sunni factions. They are getting closer. And crucially, they agree on being Iraqi nationalists who want the Americans out. There's a very strong possibility of the Sadrists joining the *muqawama* in the event the oil law is approved. Thus the preemptive, two-pronged Bush escalation on the war front - against both Muqtada and nationalist Sunnis.

### **The ever-expanding killing fields**

Stenographers of the "clash of civilizations" may rejoice. But what really matters is what 1.5 billion people of the Muslim *ummah* are seeing. They see, on a given day, apart from made-in-USA bombs over Palestine, the US bombarding Arab Muslims in Iraq, Central Asian Muslims in Afghanistan, black Muslims in Somalia. Soon, perhaps, Persian Muslims will be included. Blowback is assured.

Referring to the hearings on Capitol Hill last month on the Lancet study compiling 655,000 civilian deaths provoked by the war on Iraq, University of Michigan Professor Juan Cole wrote in his blog that the US government "has committed cliocide" - after the Greek muse Clio, who watched over the course of human history. Cliocide will of course continue.

In Iraq, there are only two stark, inevitable options for the White House: cliocide, as in mass slaughter (of Sunnis and Shi'ites alike); or defeat (which is all but assured). Bush has chosen the first option. The upcoming battle of Sadr City will signal the descent of Iraq into absolute, abysmal, irreversible chaos. Bush, in imperial-Rome mode, can then call the desolation victory, and retire. Provided, of course, the oil law is in the bag.