

Bush authorizes recall of Marine reservists to Iraq

By Barry Grey
24 August 2006

One day after President Bush told a White House press conference, “We’re not leaving [Iraq] so long as I’m the president,” the tragic meaning of his words for hundreds of American soldiers and their families was spelled out by the Marine Corps’ announcement that at least 1,200 inactive reservists will be recalled for combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The involuntary recall, the first for Marine reservists since the beginning of the Iraq war three-and-a-half years ago, was authorized by Bush on July 26. It means that men and women who have already fulfilled their four-year active duty commitment, in some cases having already served two or three tours of combat duty, will be forced to serve an additional tour of up to two years’ duration.

The announcement stunned, saddened and angered millions of Americans, including many soldiers and their families. A spokesperson for Military Families Speak Out denounced the recall and called for the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

The Democratic Party, on the contrary, charged the Bush administration with mismanaging the war by sending too few troops. Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, “The right way to address the issue is to increase the size of the military so you do not have to rely on the call-up of the individual ready reserve. We should have raised the strength of the Army and Marine Corps three years ago...”

Bush’s authorization allows the Marines to recall up to 2,500 members of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), which consists of Marines with specific skills who left active duty and returned to civilian life, but are obligated to serve if called. Aside from the initial mandatory call-up at the start of the war, when 2,000 reservists were activated, the Marine Corps has up to

now relied on reservists voluntarily returning to active duty to fill gaps in Iraq.

But as Col. Guy Stratton, who is in charge of the Marines’ manpower mobilization plans, told reporters at the Pentagon Tuesday, the number of reservists volunteering outside their active-duty service requirement has been steadily declining for two years.

Stratton said the Marines planned for the present to recall 1,200 reservists, who will be assigned to military police, communications and intelligence, and combat units. They are to report for duty next spring.

He said the Marines would not call up ready reservists in the first year, who just came off active duty, or those in the last year. That leaves an available pool of some 36,000 out of 59,000 members of the Marine IRR.

While the president’s authorization allows for a maximum call-up of 2,500 at any one time, it is open-ended. Repeated mandatory call-ups could involve many thousands more reservists in the coming months and years.

“The authority is until GWOT (the Global War on Terrorism) is over with,” Stratton said. “Until we’re told otherwise, we’ll use it.” He added that the Marines took the action because “this is going to be a long war.”

The Marine reserve call-up follows the Pentagon’s move last week ordering 600 members of the US Army’s 172nd Stryker Brigade, who had either returned to their base in Alaska or were about to board US-bound planes in Kuwait, to return to Iraq in order to bolster US forces in Baghdad.

These stop-gap measures, along with Army recalls of reservists and “stop-loss” orders extending the combat tours of troops in Iraq, are signs of the deepening US military debacle in Iraq, as well as the unraveling of the

US puppet regime in Afghanistan. More than three years into the Iraq war, the US has secured little more than the fortified Green Zone in the capital, and large parts of the countryside remain under the control of resistance forces.

The result of the US invasion and occupation has been an eruption of sectarian conflict and growing attacks by Iraqi fighters against American and British troops. To date, Washington's war of aggression has cost the lives of more than 100,000 Iraqis and over 2,600 American soldiers, with tens of thousands more wounded.

The *New York Times* on August 17 published a report on the latest Defense Department indices of the catastrophe in Iraq: the number of roadside bombs aimed mainly against American forces reached an all-time high of 2,625 in July, as compared to 1,454 in January. "The insurgency has gotten worse by almost all measures, with insurgent attacks at historically high levels. The insurgency has more public support and is demonstrably more capable in numbers of people active and in its ability to direct violence than at any point in time," a senior Defense Department official told the newspaper.

The recourse to compulsory recalls of reservists and tour extensions of active troops reflects as well the growing opposition to the war not only in the general population, but also among the soldiers themselves. One measure of the disaffection, demoralization and outright opposition within the military was provided by *Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper authorized by the Pentagon, which noted that half of the Individual Ready Reserve members given orders in 2004 by the Army asked for either a delay or an exemption to the order. Hundreds of other IRR members failed to show up at deployment stations when ordered to do so.

Some non-active duty soldiers have filed suit against the Pentagon opposing their renewed call-up. Expressing a growing sentiment among the troops, Paul Rieckhoff, founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, told the *Los Angeles Times*: "You can send Marines back for a third or fourth time, but you have to understand you are destroying their lives." He added, "The bottom line is: Everyone is exhausted."

The most recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll, reported in Wednesday's *Times*, registered the growth of antiwar sentiment among the American people as a

whole. It found that 51 percent of those surveyed saw no link between the war in Iraq and what the newspaper called "the broader anti-terror effort," a jump of 10 percentage points since June—this despite a renewed effort by the Bush administration to link the war in Iraq with the so-called "war on terror."

"Fifty-three percent said going to war was a mistake," the *Times* reported, "up from 48 percent in July; 62 percent said events were going 'somewhat or very badly' in the effort to bring order and stability to Iraq." The poll showed Bush's overall standing as unchanged, "with 57 percent disapproving and 36 percent approving."

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the threat of new wars against targets such as Syria and Iran, are the product of the policies of both parties of American big business. Behind the Democrats' unwavering embrace of the so-called "war on terrorism" is their support for the effort of American imperialism to control the oil resources of the Middle East and Central Asia, as part of its drive for global hegemony.

The inevitable response of both parties to the enormous strains on the US military will be a move to revive the draft, in order to provide the necessary pool of youth to use as military cannon fodder. This is the unstated but inexorable logic of the demand by Senator Reed, John Kerry and other leading Democrats for an expansion of the military, and it is being echoed in Republican circles.

Frederick W. Kagan, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, hinted as much in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. Kagan said, "This administration needs to understand that this is not a short-term problem, and it really needs a systemic fix in the size of the ground forces."

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