

War On Terror Expands at Expense of Human Rights, Future Stability

By Frida Berrigan

In a speech marking the 6-month anniversary of September 11th, President George Bush envisioned a “peaceful world beyond terror” where “disputes can be settled within the bounds of reason and good will and mutual security.”

He praised the efforts of “a mighty coalition of civilized nations” who are “defending our common security.” But, in the interest of building the coalition to defeat terrorism and defend common security, is the Bush administration going too far?

As it builds a “civilized” coalition, the U.S. is deepening military ties with countries whose histories of human rights abuses, instability, and/or violation of international treaties are well documented. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, an annual report recently released by the State Department, foreshadows some of the problems with these relationships. Looking at the State Department’s entries for the new allies in the war on terrorism, the refrain is “the government’s human rights record remained poor.” Can the goals of a terrorism-free world be achieved with such partners?

To answer that question it is useful to look at the weapons sales and military training being offered the Bush administration’s new partners in the war on terrorism alongside the State Department’s recent report on their human rights records.

Azerbaijan and Armenia:

The United States imposed sanctions on the former Soviet republic of Azerbaijan in 1992 in response to its bloody territorial dispute with Armenia. The sanctions, extended to include

Armenia in subsequent versions of the law, were waived from both countries as part of the FY 2002 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill so they could “support U.S. counter-terrorism efforts.” For FY 2003, the United States has requested IMET funding of \$750,000 and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) amounting to \$3 million for each country.

State Department Human Rights Report:

Azerbaijan: “The Government’s human rights record remained poor. The Government continued to restrict citizens’ ability to change their government peacefully. Some prison inmates and detainees died in part due to mistreatment by the authorities. Police tortured and beat persons in custody and used excessive force to extract confessions.”

Armenia: “The Government’s human rights record remained poor: there were deaths in police custody and deaths in the military as a result of mistreatment. Members of the security forces routinely beat detainees during arrest and interrogation. Arbitrary arrest and detention was a problem.”

Georgia:

The United States is offering \$64 million to train and equip four 300-strong battalions of Georgian forces, to help them combat terrorists hiding in the Pankisi Gorge near the Russian border. The program would equip the units with light weapons, vehicles, and communications. For fiscal year 2003, the president is requesting IMET funding of \$1.2 million and FMF of \$7 million.

State Department Human Rights Report:

"The Government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in several areas. Several deaths in custody were blamed on physical abuse, torture, or inhuman and life-threatening prison conditions. Reports of police brutality continued. Security forces continued to torture, beat, and otherwise abuse detainees."

Indonesia:

In testimony before Congress on February 27th, Admiral Dennis Blair requested that 5,000 "counter terrorism experts" be deployed to Indonesia to patrol the archipelago's shores and harbors and take part in "crisis action teams." Blair asked Congress to lift the weapons embargo against Indonesia, saying, "current restrictions on our interaction with the [Indonesian military] limit our effectiveness," adding that Indonesia is "vulnerable to terrorism penetration."

State Department Human Rights Report:

"The Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit serious abuses. Security forces were responsible for numerous instances of, at times indiscriminate, shooting of civilians, torture, rape, beatings and other abuse, and arbitrary detention in Aceh, West Timor, Papua (formerly known as Irian Jaya), and elsewhere in the country."

Yemen:

U.S. General Tommy Franks recommends that the U.S. military help train the Yemeni forces to pursue al Qaeda. The Bush administration is planning to send at least 100 U.S. troops to train local forces and has

hinted at aiding in the creation of a maritime force. The U.S. is requesting IMET funding of \$650,000 and FMF of \$2 million for FY 2003.

State Department Human Rights Report:

"The Government generally respected its citizens' human rights in some areas ... however, its record was poor in several other areas, and serious problems remain.... Members of the security forces killed a number of persons during the year. Members of the security forces tortured and otherwise abused persons, and continued to arrest and detain citizens arbitrarily, especially oppositionists in the south and other persons regarded as 'secessionists.'"

Colombia:

There are no al Qaeda terrorists in Colombia, and yet the rhetoric of fighting the war on terrorism has certainly impacted U.S. military policy to that country. One senior official said recently that, "people are interested in considering a move from counternarcotics to counter-terrorism, rather than counter-insurgency." The official conceded that the distinction was largely "just a change in words." But the Bush administration is hoping to provide Colombia with about \$374 million in military aid through the Foreign Operations Appropriations. An additional \$98 million, from the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, would be used to supply Colombian soldiers to protect a strategically important oil pipeline that has been targeted by rebels. Military training programs worth \$1.1 million have been requested for 2003. Total military aid offered to Colombia for FY 2003 is

estimated to be more than \$490 million.

State Department Human Rights Report:

"The Government's human rights record remained poor; there were continued efforts to improve the legal framework and institutional mechanisms, but implementation lagged, and serious problems remained in many areas; government security forces continued to commit serious abuses, including extrajudicial killings. Impunity remained a problem."

Philippines:

The United States recently sent six more helicopters and a number of aviation experts to join the 660 elite troops doing joint training exercises with the Filipino military. The U.S. has supplied the Philippines with \$92 million worth of military equipment so far and the Pentagon has requested an additional \$2.4 million in IMET funding and \$20 million in foreign military financing.

State Department Human Rights Report:

"The Government generally respected the human rights of citizens; however, there were serious problems in some areas. Members of the security services were responsible for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture, and arbitrary arrest and detention."

Uzbekistan:

The United States has begun military cooperation with the dictatorship of Uzbekistan. U.S. Green Beret troops are training the Uzbeki military in marksmanship, infantry patrolling, map reading, and other skills. The

United States provided “nonlethal” equipment like helmets, flak jackets, Humvee transport vehicles, and night-vision goggles to the Uzbeki military and border guards. For FY 2003, the Pentagon has requested \$1.2 million in IMET funding and \$8.7 million in foreign military funding.

State Department Human Rights Report:

“The Government’s human rights record remained very poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses. Citizens cannot exercise the right to change their government

peacefully; the Government does not permit the existence of opposition parties. Security force mistreatment resulted in the deaths of several citizens in custody.”

Can the United States develop closer relationships with dictatorships and human rights abusers in the interests of “a peaceful world beyond the war on terror?” Time will tell—and soon—that this policy is much more likely to “blowback” in dangerous consequences.

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Resources:

Terrorism in Focus, a project of Foreign Policy in Focus:
<http://www.fpif.org/indices/topics/terrorism.html>

“Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,” State Department,
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001>

Who’s Who in the Bush Administration

<http://www.fpif.org/republicanrule/index.html>

Essays Include:

Robert Cutler
Karen Hansen-Kuhn
Chris Hellman
Neil Hicks
Chris Toensing
Tomas Valasek
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A First Glance at Bush’s Policy Toward Russia
Bush’s Trade Policy: The NAFTA Express
What Can We Expect from the Penatagon?
The Bush Administration and Human Rights
Bush’s Middle East Policy: Look to His Advisors
George W. Bush and the “Other” Europe
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The United Nations: Beating Around the Bush

And Many Others!

Profiles Include:

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