

US plan for Iraq: Back to colonialism

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Bush administration officials let it be known October 10 that the White House was planning to impose US military rule over Iraq following an American invasion.

Washington aims to conquer the country and install a military proconsul—perhaps the commander of US forces in the Gulf, Gen. Tommy Franks—who will rule Iraq for months, or even years. Direct military rule is to be followed by a colonial-style regime run by US civilian officials. At some later point, the US plans to formally hand over power to its “democratic” Iraqi factotums.

Government officials compared a US military regime in Iraq to the American occupation of post-war Japan, which was ruled for six-and-half years by Gen. Douglas MacArthur. They spoke of war crimes trials against Iraqi leaders and the destruction of the ruling Ba’ath Party.

These plans make clear that the invasion of Iraq will be a war of imperialist conquest and plunder. It will signal a new epoch of colonialism, in which the US seeks to use its military supremacy to dominate the globe—seizing territories, grabbing resources and subjugating the peoples of the world to the dictates of American-based transnational corporations and banks.

This eruption of unabashed imperialism is a profound historical vindication of the Marxist analysis of contemporary capitalism. It is time for all those opposed to colonial oppression and dictatorship—indeed, for all intelligent observers of world politics—to study, or reread, Lenin’s 1916 masterwork, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

During the post-war boom, apologists of the profit system dismissed this work as outdated and irrelevant, pointing to the supposedly progressive and “democratic” tendencies of modern capitalism. They mistook the restraints on the great powers imposed by the standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union, the pressure of working class struggles at home and the eruption of anti-colonial upheavals in the “Third World” for proof that imperialism was a thing of the past.

Today, Lenin’s summing up of the basic features of monopoly capitalism, and his insistence that it necessarily entails “reaction all down the line,” read like a precise distillation of contemporary American politics and Washington’s foreign policy. Imperialist capitalism, Lenin said, is “annexationist, predatory, plunderous.” It wages war “for the division of the world, for the partition and repartition of colonies, [for] ‘spheres of influence’ of finance capital.”

“Capitalism,” he continued, “has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries.” He added: “To the numerous ‘old’

motives of colonial policy, finance capital has added the struggle for the sources of raw materials, for the export of capital, for ‘spheres of influence,’ i.e., for spheres for profitable deals, concessions, monopolist profits and so on; in fine, for economic territory in general.”

These words aptly describe the essential aims of the United States in Iraq. The methods the US employs in waging the war will necessarily coincide with the objectives of the attack: they will constitute a homicidal assault on the civilian populations of Baghdad and every other major city, aimed at killing any and all who stand in the way of American interests, and terrorizing the Iraqi people.

This is in every respect a criminal enterprise. Indeed, the Bush administration—and the occupant of the White House himself—embody a criminal social element that rose to the top of the US corporate world in the 1980s and 1990s. As has become clear from Enron and a host of other scandals, those in the highest echelons of industry and finance systematically defrauded the American people and their own companies in order to enrich themselves.

This social layer is parasitic to the core. It has contempt for democratic methods and institutions, and employs Mafia-type methods to achieve its ends. The right-wing and fascistic political representatives of this elite, who dominate the Republican Party, conspired to use a sex scandal to bring down an elected president in the Clinton years, and followed up their attempted coup with the theft of the 2000 presidential election. Now they are projecting these methods onto the global arena to steal what they cannot grab by conventional means.

The criminality of the Bush administration is not primarily a matter of individual traits or personal attitudes. It is the inexorable subjective expression of deeply rooted objective tendencies within the capitalist mode of production. The rise of the political underworld to the summit of the state unfolds within the context of accumulating contradictions and a mounting economic crisis for which capitalism has no solution, other than barbarism and war.

For more than a quarter century, the major centers of world capitalism, spearheaded by the US, have sought to offset a chronic and intractable crisis of profitability by attacking the past gains of the working class at home and intensifying on a colossal scale the impoverishment and exploitation of the oppressed masses of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The market prices of commodities and natural resources—such as oil—upon which the former colonial countries depend for their economic subsistence, have been systematically suppressed, and the economies of these nations locked in an ever tighter vise of indebtedness to international

financial capital.

But even these measures could not suffice to overcome capitalism's intrinsic contradictions. As has now become clear, the so-called boom of the 1990s, which brought to the fore the most ruthless and predatory elements in the American ruling elite, was an attempt to mask the crisis of production for profit by means of accounting and financial fraud on an unprecedented scale.

Just as underlying objective conditions propelled the American ruling elite along the path of political reaction and financial fraud at home, they have driven it to adopt the methods of military conquest and colonial rule abroad. Within US ruling circles, there is a desperate hope that the theft of the oil resources of Iraq and other countries will provide a way out of the worsening economic quagmire.

In its news account of the US plan, the *New York Times* on October 11 included a sentence—strategically buried in the middle of the article—noting that the US and its war allies “would essentially control the second largest proven reserves of oil in the world, nearly 11 percent of the total.”

The transformation of Iraq into a US protectorate and military base would provide billions in profits to American-based oil monopolies, give American capitalism a stranglehold over the world's petroleum reserves, and establish a forward position for future wars of aggression—against oil-rich Iran and Saudi Arabia to the east and south, against Syria to the north, and eventually against Russia and China.

As for Washington's nominal allies in Europe and Japan, the US takeover of Iraq is intended to shatter any hopes they have of challenging US supremacy by rendering them far more dependent on America for their supplies of oil. They cannot accept such a subservient state. The US war in Iraq will enormously intensify inter-imperialist antagonisms, setting into motion a growth of militarism and a fierce struggle for control of strategic resources, territories and markets. The US action will propel the whole world along the path to World War III.

The US political and corporate elite has become intoxicated by visions of a 21st century American version of the Roman Empire. This to a large degree accounts for the stampede of politicians from the Democratic Party to line up behind Bush's war drive. On the very day congressmen of both parties were portraying the war authorization they were about to give the White House as a mandate for high-minded diplomacy in the pursuit of democracy and the “liberation” of the Iraqi people, administration spokesmen were outlining their plans for an American police state in the Persian Gulf country.

Bush officials are reported to be studying the post-war occupation of Germany and Japan in preparation for the invasion of Iraq. But a more relevant precedent is the American colonial occupation of the Philippines following the 1898 Spanish-American War. The US military brutally suppressed nationalist resistance in the country, killing 200,000 Filipinos.

To avert the outrage and revulsion within the American population that would inevitably arise from such carnage in Iraq, the Bush administration is counting on a corrupt and pliant media to conceal its crimes. But the American ruling elite cannot in the end escape the political consequences of the war upon which it has

embarked.

There is a strong element of political derangement and delusion in its imperial schemes. It neither comprehends nor anticipates the momentous consequences of its actions.

Washington's plans for the imposition of a “Pax Americana” will meet with ferocious resistance, in the first place from the Iraqi masses. They will be joined by hundreds of millions of others in Asia and Africa who have no intention of returning to colonial slavery.

The coming war will polarize US society in a manner not seen for decades. Bush claims he is acting in the name of the American people. This is a lie. A large majority of the population does not want this war, and is not prepared to sign onto a massacre of Iraqis in behalf of the oil monopolies.

A major driving force behind the war is the desperation of the American ruling elite to divert the working class from the crisis at home. However, sooner, rather than later, the consequences of Washington's resort to global militarism will fuel the deeply felt popular anger over the squandering and theft of the nation's resources by the corporate elite, which exercises a political monopoly through the Republican and Democratic Parties.

The coming war in Iraq will signal the emergence of social and political upheavals within the US, and the turn by ever broader masses to a socialist alternative to war, inequality and repression.

This movement must be politically prepared and provided a conscious direction through the construction of a new, socialist party of the working class. Such a party must be grounded on the fundamental truth that only the unified action of the international working class can halt imperialist war and disarm the war-mongers.

As recent events have demonstrated, appeals to the Democratic Party are a hopeless and ultimately reactionary diversion. It is necessary for all serious and principled opponents of imperialist war to undertake the task of building the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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