

# US recruits Ba'athist police and functionaries for new Iraqi state

James Conachy  
24 April 2003

The widespread reinstatement by the US military of Iraqi police and functionaries in Baghdad and other cities is further verification that the invasion of Iraq had nothing to do with “liberation” or democracy. The Bush administration intends to enforce the US occupation of the country with substantial elements of Saddam Hussein’s repressive apparatus.

Some 2,000 Iraqi police are already back on the streets of Baghdad, with thousands more returning to the streets of other cities and towns. A newly reemployed police captain, Moshtaq Fadhel, bluntly summed up to *USA Today* his policing philosophy: “In Iraq you can’t get any information without giving a beating.”

The US military has appointed Zuhair Al-Noaime as the city’s police chief. Noaime joined the Iraqi police in 1966 and held the rank of general before the US invasion.

According to an account in the British *Independent* of April 21, “neighborhood watches” operating in Baghdad are, in fact, the former informer networks of the Ba’athist political police, the *Mukhabarat*. An Iraqi policeman told the newspaper: “Maybe they have found another master.”

Reports indicate the US is working with former officials of the Ba’athist regime as well its police. The *Wall Street Journal* reported April 21 on the formation of a new civil authority in Bayji, a northern Iraqi town with a population of 25,000. In a meeting overseen by a US marine brigadier general, a man named Fah Haran was elected mayor by what the *Journal* described as the “town’s tribal and civic leaders.”

Haran is the head of the area’s main tribal group and was a leading Ba’athist. Under Hussein’s rule, he was the town engineer. Marine Lieutenant Colonel William Schafer told the *Journal*: “You could say that everyone here worked for Saddam Hussein because if you didn’t, you didn’t survive. No one is totally clean, so you look at the levels of what people did.” Haran, the US military decided, “was primarily a bureaucrat.”

In Basra, the British have appointed Ghalib Kubba, a wealthy local businessman, to head the city’s interim council. Describing Kubba’s history, a merchant told the *Los Angeles Times*: “He’s a partner of Uday Hussein [Saddam’s son]. It’s well known. All commercial people from the first class in Iraq, all of them are partners of Saddam Hussein.”

The *Times* continued: “What is clear, said a Western observer here, is that it had been impossible to do business in Iraq without close links with the regime, and now it is difficult to get the country running again without the expertise of those with such links. ‘I don’t think the British are naïve’, he said. ‘I believe they think they can’t run it any other way.’”

As in Baghdad, the old police of Basra—who kept the majority Shi’ite population of the city under control—are back on the streets.

Like the accusation that Iraq threatened the US with “weapons of mass destruction,” the Bush administration’s denunciations of human rights abuses by the Iraqi Ba’athists were always cynical. They were part of the propaganda blitz designed to manipulate public opinion into backing Bush’s war policy.

For all the comparisons made by Bush and Rumsfeld of Hussein’s regime with the Nazis, Washington rejected a demand by exiled Iraqis for a systematic purge of former Ba’athists from whatever new state structure was to be created.

The *Christian Science Monitor* reported on April 21 that the Bush administration refused to endorse a proposal by exiled Iraqi lawyers for large-scale prosecution of Ba’athists. One of the lawyers told the *Monitor*: “There is a bit of ambivalence [in the Bush administration] about moving ahead with it. There’s a fear that if they [the Iraqis] have an independent structure for the judiciary, it would interfere with political plans.”

The political plans that would be interfered with by a

legal purge include the recruitment of Ba'athists. The US military has projected that as few as 75,000 American troops will need to stay in Iraq to oversee the country's "reconstruction" as an American client state. Such a relatively small American garrison assumes the incorporation of significant sections of the old repressive apparatus into the new state.

The various pro-US Iraqi exile groups returning to the country have neither the manpower nor the base of support needed to help the US military, in any significant way, to police the country. Bringing the Kurdish militias who fought alongside the US in northern Iraq into Baghdad or southern cities would provoke an eruption of popular opposition from the Arab populations. Recruiting from the remnants of the Ba'athist state offers the US the easiest solution.

This in part explains the phenomenon commented on at length on April 17 by journalist Robert Fisk, writing in the British *Independent*. While the US is hunting down Saddam Hussein and his inner-circle, little effort has been made by the US to even collect evidence against middle- and lower-level functionaries who are guilty of crimes against the Iraqi people.

Fisk—who has distinguished himself by the honesty and courage of his commentary from Iraq—documented the failure of the US military to secure locations housing potential evidence, particularly on the activities of the Iraqi security forces. Following Baghdad's fall to American troops on April 9, Fisk reported that he visited "many" of the headquarters of the Ba'athist police. He noted: "But there is no evidence even that a single British or US forensic officer has visited these sites to sift the wealth of information lying there or talk to the ex-prisoners returning to their former places of torment. Is this idleness? Or is it wilful?"

At a security station where prisoners were interrogated and tortured, he found hundreds of files strewn about on the floors. In the small sample of papers he examined, he found lists of victims and the names of senior Iraqi intelligence officers. In his piece, Fisk noted: "Were these monsters, these men? Yes. Are they sought by the Americans? No. Are they now working for the Americans? Yes, quite possibly—indeed some of them may well be in the long line of ex-security thugs who queue every morning outside the Palestine Hotel in the hope of being re-hired by the US Marines' Civil Affairs Unit."

At the main secret police headquarters, Fisk was led to bags of shredded documents piled in a back room. He

commented: "Shouldn't they be taken to Washington or London and reconstituted to learn their secrets? Even the unshredded files contain a wealth of information. But again, the Americans have not bothered—or do not want—to search through these papers."

Fisk's charge that the US military left Iraqi intelligence and police facilities unsecured when it seized Baghdad is supported by other media reports. A US intelligence official ostensibly responsible for collecting and analyzing the regime's records told the *Los Angeles Times* of April 18: "A lot of times the documents have been looted or removed before we get there." The *Times* noted that any investigations would be hindered by the dispersal and destruction of evidence.

The mutual attraction between the US occupation forces and Ba'athist police and security personnel is likely to increase under conditions where anti-American Shi'ite Islamic fundamentalists are emerging as a major political force in Iraq.

The Ba'athist regime's repression of Shi'ites, the absence of left-wing and secular alternatives and the immense economic suffering caused by the United Nations sanctions during the 1990s have created conditions for the fundamentalists to build a base among the predominantly Shi'ite urban and rural poor. They have been able to mix their religious reaction and backwardness with populist denunciations of both US imperialism and the privileges of the Ba'athist elite.

Working for the US will not only provide operatives of the old regime with jobs, but also some degree of protection from the Shi'ite population they brutally repressed—and may very well be ordered to repress again, this time on Washington's orders.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**