

Threat of greater repression

# Shakeup in US occupation as Iraqi society disintegrates

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The sweeping purge of the American military occupation authority's top personnel is an indication of the deep crisis plaguing Washington's attempt to install a neocolonialist regime in Iraq. Having effectively destroyed Iraq's infrastructure and social institutions through massive bombardment and a dozen years of punishing economic sanctions, the US has appeared powerless to restore even a semblance of order and basic social services for this country's 24 million people.

As the new US viceroy, L. Paul Bremer, arrived, looting was erupting with renewed force in Baghdad and fires could be seen from torched government buildings. In the south of the country, the World Health Organization was warning that, under conditions in which raw sewage is being dumped into rivers and the public health system is in a shambles, the growing number of cholera cases raise the threat of a devastating epidemic.

Far from conditions improving since organized fighting ended and the US settled into its occupation, they have deteriorated. Press reports from the Iraqi capital cite mounting gunfire each night, while carjackings have become rampant.

CARE International, the humanitarian relief agency, protested the failure of US authorities to restore even minimum order in Baghdad. Protesting that it had become impossible to do relief work—two of its cars were stolen at gunpoint this week—CARE demanded: "What does it say about the situation when criminals can move freely about the city and humanitarian aid workers cannot?"

More than a month after Washington announced the "liberation" of Baghdad, electric power is operating at barely 40 percent capacity, leaving large areas of the city blacked out each night. Without power, neither the water nor sewage systems can function properly. The Iraqi official tapped by the occupation authority to head the country's Electricity Commission said this week that it will be two months before Baghdad's power is back to normal. Running water has yet to be restored to much of the city. With the intense heat of summer approaching, both air conditioning and refrigeration will be impossible.

The overwhelming majority of the population remains without employment or income, and food rations given out by the Saddam Hussein regime before the US intervention are rapidly running out. While US officials have repeatedly promised those workers who returned to their jobs \$20 in "emergency pay," very few have seen any money. In another indication of deepening desperation, hundreds of demobilized Iraqi soldiers marched on the US military headquarters in Baghdad Monday to demand back pay and a return to work.

In one of the more ghastly byproducts of the US war and ham-fisted occupation, there are reports that villagers near looted nuclear facilities are showing signs of radiation sickness. The International Atomic Energy Agency this week repeated its plea that it be allowed back into Iraq, pointing out that it has experts familiar with the effects of radiation contamination on civilian populations. The agency provided detailed warnings about the need to protect these installations that were ignored by US authorities.

The former Shell Oil Company CEO tapped to oversee the Iraqi oil industry, Philip J. Carroll, expressed the growing dismay of some in the US occupation regime over the social disintegration surrounding them. "I think there's no question the window is closing," he told the *New York Times*. "There's a limit to people's patience, and we'd do well to remember that every day."

Even the oil facilities that US forces were supposed to secure as their first objective have been severely vandalized and looted. Carroll expressed surprise at the extent of the damage and the magnitude of the problems in restoring the flow of oil to pre-war levels.

In a caustic editorial reflecting outrage over the criminal mismanagement of the US occupation, the *Financial Times* of London wrote: "When L. Paul Bremer III, Washington's new civil administrator in Iraq, arrived in Baghdad yesterday, he described the man he is replacing, retired US general Jay Garner, as having been 'very effective.' One can only hope he was just being polite."

The editorial went on to cite the myriad indicators of social collapse and to charge US military forces with only

exacerbating the chaos in the country. US troops, the editorial said, have “either stood aside or fired recklessly at half-perceived threats, killing and wounding dozens of civilians.” Describing Garner and other top occupation officials, the paper continued: “Their squabbling viceroys are isolated in a former presidential palace, their contact limited mostly to Iraqi exiles.”

Finally, in what amounts to the most damning condemnation from a paper which speaks for the financial elite of America’s only significant ally in the war and a country that was once the world’s greatest colonial power, the editorial declared, “Persisting mixed signals from the Bush administration, moreover, give the impression it is not taking its obligations in Iraq very seriously.”

The social catastrophe confronting the Iraqi people today, like the US military aggression that produced it, is a crime of war. Washington has utterly failed to meet the obligations imposed upon it as an occupying power under the concrete terms of international law.

Bremer’s replacement of Garner was initially interpreted by the media as a triumph for the State Department in its internecine conflict with the Pentagon. However, there is little to support the view that the shakeup signals a shift toward moderation and diplomacy. On the contrary, it almost certainly presages a turn toward greater use of military violence.

Bremer is a right-wing supporter of the Bush administration who enjoys close ties to the neo-conservative elements who dominate the Pentagon’s civilian leadership. He has no background as a diplomat in the region, outside of having specialized in “anti-terrorism” and urged military action against a number of Islamic countries. In short, his specialty is not “nation-building” but military retaliation and killing. Like Garner, he will report to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Moreover, Bremer’s replacement of Garner is only part of a broader shakeup. Barbara Bodine, a former US ambassador, was summarily fired from a position that was commonly referred to as the US “mayor of Baghdad.” State Department officials said that she was being reassigned to the job of negotiating bilateral agreements exempting US military forces from the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

A number of other senior officials assigned to Baghdad are also to be removed, according to a report published in the *New York Times*. These include: Margaret Tutwiler, who was the US authority’s communications director; Tim Carney, assigned to oversee the Iraqi Ministry of Industry and Minerals; and two others, David Dumford and John Limbert, who both held top posts in the US Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs.

Like Bodine, all of these officials were former ambassadors to Arab countries and several had publicly criticized the Bush administration’s policy in the region before the Iraq war. There has been speculation that these career diplomats had been seen as “Arabists,” out of sync with the right-wing Pentagon leadership’s unqualified support for Israel and its determination

to use the conquest of Iraq as a means of imposing US imperialist domination throughout the region.

Nearly 150,000 US troops remain in Iraq, and the Pentagon has indicated that more may be deployed. Lt. Gen. David McKiernan, commander of US ground forces in Iraq, complained last week that the present level of forces is insufficient to secure the country. “Imagine spreading 150,000 soldiers in the state of California and then ask yourself could you secure all of California all the time with 150,000 soldiers,” McKiernan told reporters. “The answer is no. So we’re focused on certain areas, on certain transportation networks we need to make sure are open.”

Earlier this month, the Pentagon announced that 4,000 more soldiers will be deployed in Baghdad, bringing the total number of troops in the city to 16,000.

General Tommy Franks, who commanded the invasion of Iraq, suggested earlier this week that US military occupation of Iraq could continue for years. “What the future will hold a year, two, three ahead of us is not exactly knowable,” Franks said at a Pentagon press conference.

Bremer, meanwhile, quickly backed away from promises made by Garner to put in place some form of interim Iraqi leadership—a “nucleus of an Iraqi government with an Iraqi face on it that is dealing with the coalition”—this month. Bremer stressed that no timetable has been set for installing any Iraqi officials.

Washington is intent on creating a puppet regime for the purpose of signing away the country’s oil and other wealth to US-based corporations. For that purpose, it has brought back to Iraq an émigré group of crooks and CIA agents headed by the convicted embezzler Ahmed Chalabi. However, US authorities are confronted with the necessity of suppressing popular opposition and all those movements that enjoy a measure of genuine popular support in order to impose the kind of regime it requires.

The shakeup within the US military occupation is a preparation for intensified repression. In a real sense, the war in Iraq is entering into a new and protracted stage.



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