

# The UN bombing: a product of the US occupation of Iraq

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A massive truck bomb yesterday tore through the Canal Hotel that houses the UN offices in Baghdad killing at least 20 people, including the top UN official in Iraq—Sergio Vieira de Mello, and injuring more than 100. The explosion took place at around 4.30 p.m., as a press conference was underway in the three-storey building that has functioned as the UN headquarters in Iraq since 1991.

The attack was well organised. A concrete truck packed with an estimated 250 kilograms of C4 military explosives was detonated outside a newly-built, concrete retaining wall around the UN compound. The wall offered no protection from the huge blast that destroyed the front of the building, an adjoining hospital and a number of cars and shattered windows blocks away.

No organisation has claimed responsibility for the bombing. It has been immediately seized upon by the Bush administration to justify further indiscriminate reprisals and repression against the Iraqi people. At the same time, the attack underscores the depth of hostility, anger and despair felt by wide sections of the population in Iraq and throughout the Middle East towards Washington's criminal occupation of the country. Political responsibility for the bomb blast rests with the US and its accomplices, who have created nothing short of a nightmare for the Iraqi people.

US President Bush briefly interrupted a game of golf to make a banal statement to the media condemning the UN bombing. "Every sign of progress in Iraq adds to the desperation of these terrorists and the remnants of Saddam's brutal regime. The civilised world will not be intimidated," he declared. "The Iraqi people have been liberated from a dictator. Iraq is on an irreversible course toward self-government and peace."

His comments stand reality on its head. Washington

has not liberated Iraq but replaced a brutal dictatorship, which it helped create, with a neo-colonial regime headed by Paul Bremer III, a proconsul with absolute powers. The Iraqi people are no freer under Bremer than they were under Saddam Hussein. Under the pretext of hunting down "Baathist remnants," US troops routinely search people, vehicles and houses, killing or incarcerating anyone suspected of opposition. Thousands of people are being held, and in some cases tortured, in US-run jails and detention centres in flagrant breach of their basic democratic rights.

The purpose of the US-led invasion was not to bring "self-government and peace" but to loot the economy, particularly the country's huge oil reserves. Much of the limited and decaying physical and social infrastructure that existed under the previous regime has been destroyed, leaving masses of people without jobs, basic services and essentials such as electricity, water and adequate food.

It is hardly surprising in these circumstances that young Iraqis are joining the ranks of groups advocating armed resistance. Attacks on US and allied troops are a daily occurrence. In recent days, basic infrastructure has been targetted with a bomb attack on a water main in Baghdad and the rupturing of an oil export pipeline in the north of the country. On August 7, a large car bomb detonated outside the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, killing at least 17 people.

A number of US-based analysts and experts have begun speculating that "outsiders," possibly the Al Qaeda network, organised the bombings at the Jordanian embassy and the UN compound. There is no direct evidence of such involvement. Even if it turns out to be the case, however, it simply highlights the fact that the US invasion has transformed Iraq and the broader region into a fertile breeding ground for anti-

American militia of many different complexions, including Islamic extremists such as Al Qaeda.

The most significant aspect of yesterday's bombing was that the UN, and possibly even de Mello himself, were deliberately targeted. In condemning the blast, various governments in Europe and the Middle East have bewailed the fact that the UN was attacked. Syria, for instance, issued a statement urging the UN to continue its role "in helping the Iraqi people restore their freedom and independence."

But there is no reason why the Iraqi people should see any difference between the US and the UN. For more than a decade, the UN has been complicit in all of the crimes of the US and its allies against the Iraqi people. The UN not only supported the 1990-91 Gulf War but, under the pretext of disarming Iraq, imposed and supervised the decade-long economic sanctions that resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths. While the UN Security Council drew back from giving a final seal of approval for the US invasion, all of its members, including Syria, supported last year's resolution 1441, which set the course for war, and this May rubberstamped the US occupation of Iraq and the plundering of its oil.

The UN headquarters in Baghdad has been a centre for intrigue and duplicity since its establishment over a decade ago. It was the base of operations for the UN weapons inspection teams that were used to spy on and create provocations against the Hussein regime. It was also used by the UN officials who supervised the sanctions program that crippled the Iraqi economy and imposed a decade of deprivation and suffering on the Iraqi population.

De Mello played an integral part in the UN's sordid operations in Iraq and elsewhere. For three decades after joining the UN as a young graduate in 1969, de Mello has served as a political representative of the major powers in one trouble spot after another—from Cyprus to Bangladesh and Cambodia. He played a prominent role in imposing the dictates of the US and European powers in the Balkans during the 1990s. In 1999, he was inserted as the special UN representative to help manage the NATO occupation of war-ravaged Kosovo. In late 1999, he took up the post as chief administrator following the Australian-led takeover of East Timor. When he left in 2002, the East Timorese people, like their counterparts in the Balkans, were still

mired in poverty and unemployment.

His services were appreciated in the world's major capitals. In the discussions in May leading up to the UN's formal endorsement of the US occupation, the media reported that de Mello was strongly backed by the Bush administration for the senior UN post in Iraq. De Mello was even mooted as a possible successor to Kofi Annan in the post of UN Secretary General. Annan's spokesman Fred Eckhard underscored de Mello's significance yesterday when he said his death would be "a setback politically for the UN mission."

There is no doubt that in the aftermath of the Canal Hotel bombing, the Bush administration will step up its repression against the Iraqi people. Bush hinted at what was in store when he declared yesterday: "[The] Iraqi people face a challenge, and they face a choice. The terrorists want to return to the days of the torture chambers and mass graves. The Iraqi people who want peace and freedom must reject them and fight terror."

Stripped of its obvious lies, Bush's menacing statement is a warning to the Iraqi people: either you are with us, or against us. By recklessly invading and occupying Iraq, the US administration has turned the country into a quagmire that is producing spiralling opposition and resistance. Bush's comments are a signal that the political gangsters in the White House are preparing to escalate their war of attrition against the Iraqi population.



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