

The Iraq quagmire

The Editorial Board
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The truck bomb that blew up the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on Tuesday shattered the Bush administration's claims that it is well on the way to pacifying Iraq. The bombing, coming on the heels of explosions that severed Iraq's northern oil pipeline and cut off water to much of the country's capital, as well as the daily casualties inflicted on US troops, makes it clear that the resistance to the US occupation is serious and growing.

The Bush White House and the media issued ritualistic condemnations of "terrorism" in the wake of the attack. "The terrorists who struck today have again shown their contempt for the innocent," declared Bush. "They showed their fear of progress and their hatred of peace." He declared them "enemies of the Iraqi people" and "enemies of the civilized world."

These denunciations are the height of hypocrisy. Iraq is a country occupied by a foreign power. The attack on the UN building was carried out in the context of a campaign of resistance to this occupation that enjoys the support of broad layers of the Iraqi population.

For Bush to accuse those who planned and executed the UN bombing of "contempt for the innocent" is brazen, to say the least. He waged a war against Iraq in flagrant violation of international law. It is conservatively estimated that at least 5,000 Iraqi civilians lost their lives in the US invasion, many of them killed as a result of US bombings of targets located in or near residential areas. At least 20,000 more suffered serious injury and are still suffering from the effects. Washington dismissed the carnage carried out against these innocent victims as "collateral damage."

The claim that an attack on the United Nations is a particularly heinous crime because the international agency's only aim is to "help the Iraqis" is false. No doubt, among those killed in the bombing were people who believed they were serving the interests of ordinary Iraqis. But more than a decade of bitter experience has proven that the UN is by no means an innocent bystander in the tragedy that has been inflicted upon the people of

that tortured country.

The UN approved and enforced punishing economic sanctions demanded by Washington in the wake of the Persian Gulf War of 1991, creating conditions of mass hunger and disease that claimed the lives of an estimated half a million Iraqi children. It oversaw a weapons inspections regime that served as a pretext for maintaining these sanctions by demanding that Iraq accomplish the impossible task of proving a negative, namely that no banned weapons or weapons programs existed on its soil.

Finally, just a week before the bombing, the UN Security Council voted to endorse the recently formed Iraqi Governing Council, an essentially powerless body of Quislings that was hand-picked by Washington's proconsul in Baghdad, Paul Bremer, to lend an "Iraqi face" to the US military occupation. It likewise approved the establishment of a United Nations Assistance Mission, whose mandate included the training of a new Iraqi police force.

Thus, the UN acted to legitimize an illegal military occupation and train forces to repress the resistance. That those opposed to the occupation targeted the UN should hardly come as a surprise.

The Iraqi resistance is waging the type of campaign that has been waged historically by every people battling against foreign occupation. Unable to match the overwhelming superiority of US firepower, the resistance fighters rely on one critical strategic advantage: it is their country. Their aim is to make it ungovernable for the occupiers.

Those who plotted the illegal war on Iraq bear full political and moral responsibility for the violence and bloodshed in that country today. That they denounce as "terrorists" those who fail to greet the US invaders as "liberators" is hardly an innovation. Such was the case in Vietnam, Algeria, southern Africa and every other part of the globe where oppressed peoples fought to throw off the yoke of colonialism and foreign occupation.

It should be recalled that the Nazis, who pioneered the policy of "preventive war" adopted by Bush, routinely

condemned anyone who resisted German occupation in the Second World War as “terrorists.” Those who opposed Nazi aggression, however, lauded the attacks of the resistance, whose exploits were glorified in not a few Hollywood films.

Tuesday’s bombing in Baghdad provoked a flood of media commentary that, in one form or another, proposed that Washington answer the attack with even greater repression. “The Bush administration has to commit sufficient additional resources, and, if necessary, additional troops...” declared the *New York Times* in its lead editorial Wednesday. “The Iraqis need to see that Washington has the will and the means to get their country back on its feet.”

In the same newspaper, columnist Maureen Dowd penned a particularly cynical piece. She acknowledged that in advance of the war the Bush administration had “inflated the threats to America” and “ginned up links between Saddam and Al Qaeda.” She further pointed out that while no threat from armed Islamist groups existed in Iraq before the war, the invasion and occupation had produced conditions in which these organizations could flourish. “The Bush team has now created the very monster that it conjured up to alarm Americans into backing a war on Iraq,” she wrote.

In the end, however, she concluded: “We can’t leave, and we can’t stay forever. We just have to slug it out.”

“Slugging it out” means that many more American youth in uniform must be killed or wounded, and even greater numbers of Iraqis and youths from other Arab countries must be sacrificed. It amounts to a justification for continuing a brutal neocolonial war.

No one knows how many Iraqis have been killed, imprisoned or tortured thus far, as the Pentagon does not provide such information. Thousands are being held at huge detention camps set up by US forces around Baghdad. Iraqi detainees—including children—have testified to being subjected to inhuman treatment. Many have been kept handcuffed under the hot sun or held in sweltering pens for days at a time.

As for the US occupation forces, by the end of this month the number killed since Bush declared major combat operations over on May 1 will almost certainly surpass the number who lost their lives during the invasion itself.

The bombing of the UN headquarters will unquestionably become the pretext for an intensification of the campaign of violence against the Iraqi people. Resistance is to be met by reprisals. Such has been the

pattern in similar wars of occupation, from the Nazi massacre in Lidice, Czechoslovakia to the Battle of Algiers and “Operation Phoenix” in Vietnam. When Bush declared that “the civilized world will not be intimidated,” he was alluding to the mass roundups and killings to come.

Underlying many of the arguments for a continued and even intensified occupation of Iraq is the conception that something good can yet come out of an illegal war of aggression carried out under false pretenses and for what can only be described as criminal motives—the seizure of Iraq’s oil resources. This is a gross delusion of the kind that led to the deaths of nearly 60,000 Americans and millions of Vietnamese 30 years ago.

No amount of US troops or professions of Washington’s good intentions will halt the resistance to foreign occupation. The people of Iraq and the rest of the Arab world have a long history of opposing colonial rule that will not be erased by empty rhetoric about “democracy” and “liberation.”

How many people will have to die—Iraqi and American alike—before this criminal enterprise is finally brought to an end?

The American people must call a halt to this filthy colonial-style war. It must not accept that American youth be placed needlessly and recklessly in harm’s way for a single additional day, and it must repudiate the murderous repression that is being carried out by the Bush administration in its name. It must demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq.

The demand must be advanced as well for a full and public investigation into the manner in which the war was foisted on the American people. Congress and the Democrats abdicated their responsibilities, failing to challenge or even question the false claims made by the Bush administration in the months leading up to the invasion. But those responsible must be held legally accountable. The officials who are implicated in the most serious crime under international law—conspiring to carry out a war of aggression—must be punished. This is a prerequisite for preventing new wars of aggression in the future.



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