

Washington to use UN to select puppet regime in Iraq

James Conachy
20 April 2004

It is a measure of the political crisis created by the popular uprising in Iraq that the Bush administration has now been compelled to turn to the UN to install a compliant regime in Baghdad. After effectively sidelining the organisation in the lead-up and immediate aftermath of the invasion, both Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair endorsed on April 16 the proposal by special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi that the UN play the main role in selecting the members of the “caretaker” Iraqi government scheduled to come into existence on June 30.

In the lead-up to the US presidential elections, the scenario was supposed to have been very different. According to the initial White House script, resistance was to have been largely crushed by now, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) long forgotten and committees of carefully vetted, pro-US Iraqis were to select an interim government. As Bush campaigned for reelection, a puppet regime would be installed on June 30 and be on hand to praise the president for Iraq’s “liberation”. In the background, the real agenda of handing the country’s oil resources over to US corporations and developing long-term US military bases would roll forward.

Instead, two weeks after the uprising erupted in the slums of Baghdad, even the US military grip over Iraq is far from secure. Thousands of Iraqi fighters still control Fallujah, defying a 3,000-strong force of US marines. Najaf is being held by thousands of militiamen loyal to Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr and the main Shiite clerics have warned they will endorse an armed defence if the 2,500 American troops massed on the outskirts of the city attempt to enter. Baghdad itself has been wracked by street fighting, strikes, anti-US demonstrations and increasingly sophisticated guerilla attacks on American supply lines and bases. More American troops have already been killed and wounded so far this month than during the three-week invasion in March-April 2003.

Of greater concern to the long-term agenda of American imperialism in the Middle East, Washington’s limited base of political support in Iraq has effectively collapsed in the

face of a movement of the Iraqi people. The US Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) has been left largely isolated in its fortress headquarters in Baghdad.

US-installed local councils in the capital and across southern Iraq readily handed over control of government buildings and assets to the militiamen fighting for al-Sadr. Thousands of police, civil defence troops and soldiers of the US-recruited Iraqi Army have refused to fight against the uprising and in numerous cases have joined it. Members of the US-installed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) have resigned in protest over the massacre of civilians, with one denouncing the American attempts to pacify Fallujah as “unacceptable and illegal”.

The uprising is also fuelling opposition inside the US. On top of the exposure of the White House’s lies over WMDs and Iraq’s links to international terrorism, it is now clear that the Iraqi people want the US forces out of their country. There is also nervousness among Washington’s allies. Both Spain and Honduras have announced a rapid withdrawal of their troops from Iraq.

The Bush administration, and with it the entire American political establishment, desperately needs to legitimise its occupation of Iraq. At the same time, however, any Iraqi government imposed by the occupation forces will be regarded by the Iraqi people as completely illegitimate. As a result, the US has called on the services of the UN.

The UN pulled its personnel out of Iraq last October, concerned that its presence in Iraq was eroding what little credibility the organisation had left. The August bombing of the UN Baghdad headquarters reflected the fact that in the eyes of large numbers of Iraqis, it was nothing more than an accomplice in the crimes of US imperialism. The UN had enforced economic sanctions against Iraq for over a decade, legitimised the WMD accusations that formed the US case for war and provided post facto endorsement of the US invasion.

After sidelining the UN throughout most of 2003, the Bush administration moved this year to ask the organisation to take a direct political role in Iraq. In January, under pressure

from US opponents such as al-Sadr, the Shiite clerical leadership under Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani declared its opposition to any government that was not democratically elected in a popular vote. In January, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Shiites—in an early anticipation of this month's uprising—took part in demonstrations against the US plans to have the interim regime selected by committee.

Faced with the prospect of a Shia rebellion if it simply proceeded in defiance of mass sentiment, the Bush administration requested that the UN send Brahimi on a "fact-finding mission" to Iraq and put forward "independent" recommendations on how the transfer of sovereignty should proceed.

Brahimi was chosen for obvious reasons. After the US invasion of Afghanistan, he played a crucial diplomatic role, cajoling and bullying various warlords and political figures to accept the installation of Hamid Karzai—the preferred US choice—as the head of an unelected government. The Bush administration hoped he could do the same in Iraq.

The recommendations of the February UN fact-finding mission did not disappoint Washington. On the grounds that there was not enough time and that the country was too unstable, Brahimi rejected any possibility of holding elections before June 30. His report suggested that enlarging the existing Iraqi Governing Council to between 150 and 200 appointees would create a legitimate "transitional legislative council". After Sistani indicated his agreement, the Bush administration appeared to endorse the proposal.

The US plans, however, continued to unravel. The interim Iraqi constitution that was adopted on March 8 was publicly condemned even by IGC members who signed it. Sadr, and then Sistani, declared it illegitimate and began collecting tens of thousands of signatures demanding its revision. There are good reasons to believe that the US decision to launch a crackdown on Sadr in late March, which triggered this month's uprising, was intended to weaken the opposition to the interim constitution by removing the most militant element of the Shiite leadership.

Brahimi returned in Iraq on April 4, the day the uprising erupted. He spent 10 days in the country, ostensibly to solicit the opinion of a range of Iraqis on how the June 30 transfer of sovereignty should take place. Due to security concerns, he barely left Baghdad. He did not consult with any section of the Shiite religious elite.

The outcome is a new set of UN recommendations that, once again, entirely conform to the interests of US imperialism and violate the democratic and social aspirations of the Iraqi people.

In the midst of a rebellion whose main demand is that the US and other foreign forces get out of Iraq, Brahimi has proposed that an interim government still be formed on June

30, with its membership selected by negotiations between the UN, the Bush administration and the current members of the IGC. Elections will take place at the end of year, but Iraqis who have actively fought against the US occupation will be barred.

The so-called "sovereign" Iraqi governments envisaged by the UN will have no authority over the US and foreign occupation forces, which will continue to have free rein to suppress Iraqi resistance. Brahimi told a press conference: "There will be a government that will be sovereign, that will exercise this sovereignty. Of course realities will have to be addressed. Sovereignty will be handed over, but the 150,000 soldiers who are here are not going to disappear on the 1st of July."

Bush, predictably, enthused about Brahimi's proposals, declaring them "a way forward to establishing an interim government that is broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people". The real impact, however, will be to further discredit and undermine the UN claims to have any degree of independence from the major powers. The organisation has thoroughly exposed itself before millions as nothing more than a pliant tool of US imperialism.

Even UN spokesmen have publicly expressed trepidation about the reception UN officials will receive in Iraq. John Mortimer, a senior aide to UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, told the *New York Times*: "It's quite nice when you've been generally dissed about your irrelevancy and then suddenly to have people coming to you on bended knee and saying 'We need you to come back'. On the other hand, it's quite unnerving to feel you're being projected into a very violent and volatile situation where you might be regarded as an agent or faithful servant of a power that has incurred great hostility."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact