Iraq's new prime minister, the CIA and their record of terrorist bombings

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An article in the *New York Times* last week about Iraq's new prime minister, Ayad Allawi, has once again highlighted the hypocrisy of the Bush administration's "war on terrorism" and its claims to be bringing democracy to Iraq.

Allawi has a particularly sordid past. The son of a wealthy Shiite family, Allawi was an enthusiastic member of the Baath Party for a decade in Baghdad. He resigned from the party in 1975 while in Britain, became an opponent of the Saddam Hussein regime and began a lengthy collaboration with various intelligence agencies, including MI6 and the CIA. In 1990, as Washington turned on its former ally Hussein and launched the first Gulf War, Allawi established the Iraqi National Accord (INA), composed largely of dissident Baathists, including military and intelligence officers, to take advantage of new opportunities opening up.

All this is openly acknowledged by the INA and Allawi, who recently declared that he was not ashamed of his connections to the CIA and other intelligence services. What the *New York Times* article revealed, however, was that Allawi and the INA, at the behest of the CIA, carried out various activities inside Iraq in the early 1990s to destabilise the Hussein regime. These included car bombings and attacks of the type that Allawi and the US now denounce as "terrorist".

Most of the sources for the article are unnamed US intelligence officials. While their statements remain unconfirmed, neither the Bush administration nor Allawi has denied the report's accuracy. The INA bombings took place between 1992 and 1995 using explosives that were smuggled into the country via the US-imposed "no-fly" zone in northern Iraq, which was a hotbed for CIA intrigue in the 1990s.

US intelligence officials played down the number of civilian casualties. Former CIA operative Robert Baer, who worked with Iraqi exile groups, recalled that one bomb "blew up a school bus; schoolchildren were killed". He was not sure if it was the INA's work, but other intelligence officials told the *New York Times* that the INA was the only group involved in such activities at the time.

The *New York Times* report refers to a 1997 article in the British-based *Independent* newspaper, which was based on a videotape with Abu Amneh al-Khadami, who described himself as the INA's chief bomb maker. Details of the video, subsequently provided in a book by Patrick and Andrew Cockburn entitled "Saddam: An American Obsession," add to the evidence of the INA's involvement:

"No one had ever claimed responsibility for the bomb blasts that echoed around Baghdad in 1994 and 1995. One explosion had gone off in a cinema, another in a mosque. A car bomb outside the offices of *al-Jourmoriah*, the Baath Party newspaper, had wounded a large number of passers-by and killed a child. Altogether, the bombs had killed as many as a hundred civilians."

The book explains how an INA leader, Adnan Nuri, a former Iraqi general, had Khadami released from a Kurdish jail and mapped out the bombing campaign. According to Khadami, who had a team of at least a dozen men, the campaign's purpose "was to impress Nuri's sponsors in the CIA with the operational reach of the organisation they were funding." The account explains that Khadami made the video after he began to suspect Nuri. On camera, he complained that his sponsor had failed to provide sufficient money and explosives.

While there is no means for verifying the detail, there appears to be little doubt that the INA, with the blessing

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of the CIA, carried out these terrorist attacks. One US official, who worked with Allawi in the early 1990s, commented to the *New York Times*: "No one had any problem with sabotage in Baghdad back then... I don't think anyone could have known how things would turn out today."

Allawi and the INA went on to attempt a coup against Hussein in 1996, which failed miserably. Iraqi intelligence had penetrated the INA network, learned of the plan and rounded up over 100 of the plotters. The CIA, however, maintained close contacts with Allawi. He also retained ties with MI6 and Saudi Arabian intelligence, and in Jordan where the INA set up an office and a radio station.

Like the rest of the newly selected puppet regime in Baghdad, Allawi has a long record of support for Washington and championed the US-led invasion of Iraq. But his particular qualifications for being prime minister include his involvement in the bombings of the early 1990s. Under conditions where the US occupation faces relentless daily attack, Washington regards Allawi's proven record of ruthlessness as essential to stamping out the continuing armed resistance. As a former CIA analyst Kenneth Pollack cynically commented to the *New York Times*: "Send a thief to catch a thief."

Allawi has made "security" one of his priorities. His only criticism of the US occupation has been that Washington's proconsul in Baghdad, Paul Bremer III, dismantled the repressive apparatus of Saddam Hussein. Allawi is now busily seeking to incorporate elements of the Baathist regime in the Iraqi army, police and intelligence services as the means for cracking down on widespread popular opposition to the US and its local puppets.

At an official gathering last week, Allawi outlined plans to rebuild the Iraqi security forces and to bring back the death penalty. "We need to reconstitute or build an internal security apparatus similar to the MI5 or the FBI, which has the power of interrogation and detention," he told reporters.

The process has already begun. Last December, Allawi and Ibrahim al-Janabi, another senior INA member, flew to the CIA headquarters in the US to meet with CIA director George Tenet and other top officials about plans to reconstitute an internal intelligence service. Janabi told the *New York Times* that the new body would include former members of Hussein's notorious secret police—the Mukhabarat. While Janabi played down the numbers involved, he insisted that Mukhabarat members had invaluable connections, knowledge and experience.

At the same function, Allawi told a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: "I am a tough guy". He explained that he would like to reestablish at least five divisions of the old Iraqi army each of 10,000 men. "Entire units won't be coming back," he declared. "But 40 to 50 percent of the army would be available, the mid- to lower ranks and warrant officers."

All of this makes a mockery of the Bush administration's claims to be establishing democracy to Iraq. Washington has installed a man known for his loyalty to the US and his ruthlessness. His brief is to intimidate and terrorise a hostile population into submission, using any available means. It is no accident that he seeking to recruit the torturers, hangmen and thugs of the old Baathist regime.

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