

Mounting concern in US, Europe over Iraq debacle

Patrick Martin
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A series of negative and critical comments—most notably from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan—has highlighted the growing concern in the political and media establishment that the US occupation of Iraq is turning into a political and military disaster. In both the United States and Europe, representatives of the ruling classes fear that the Bush administration has set into motion a process of political upheaval, not only in the Middle East, but internationally.

Annan's comment September 16 that the US war against Iraq was illegal came at the end of protracted word-parsing in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation. The exchange went as follows:

BBC: "So you don't think there was legal authority for the war."

Mr. Annan: "I have made it clear, I have stated clearly, that it was not in conformity with the UN Charter."

BBC: "It was illegal."

Mr. Annan: "Yes, if you wish."

BBC: "It was illegal."

Mr. Annan: "Yes, I've indicated that it was not in conformity with the UN Charter. From our point of view, from the charter point of view, it was illegal."

Annan was only repeating what the whole world knows, but the Bush administration and the servile US media conceal: that Washington is the world's biggest outlaw government.

Bush administration officials dismissed Annan's comments with typical cynicism, focusing not on the truth of the allegation, but on its timing, (two weeks before the Australian election, six weeks before the US election, 18 months after the invasion). John Danforth, the US ambassador to the United Nations, said: "If I had been his adviser, which I wasn't, I would have advised him not to say it at all—and if he was going to say it at all, not to say it now."

Secretary of State Colin Powell called Annan's remarks "not a very useful statement to make at this point. What does it gain anyone? We should all be gathering around the idea of helping the Iraqis, not getting into these kinds of side issues."

Far from being a "side issue," however, the legality of the war has vast implications. From the standpoint of international law, if the war is illegal, then the governments that waged it—primarily the US, Britain, Australia and the previous government in Spain—are guilty of war crimes. Those personally responsible—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, Rice, and their international partners like Blair and Howard—are war criminals, deserving of the same juridical process that the Nazi mass murderers faced at Nuremberg. Moreover, those countries and international institutions, including the UN itself, that are now collaborating in the occupation of Iraq are guilty of sanctioning the illegal war retrospectively, and thus share in the crime.

Annan has been prompted to make this admission because of the

disastrous state of affairs in Iraq, where the guerrilla insurgency against the occupation regime is making the country ungovernable. He spent most of his interview with the BBC raising doubts that Iraq would be in a position to hold national elections by the end of next January.

"You cannot have credible elections if the security conditions continue as they are now," he said. He was responding indirectly to a statement by the US-appointed interim Iraqi president, Ghazi al-Yawar, who said earlier this week that the elections might have to be postponed, but only if UN officials concurred with the decision.

This assessment was confirmed in a series of reports in the US and British press, beginning with a CIA intelligence document leaked to the *New York Times* and made public the same day as Annan's interview. The classified National Intelligence Estimate prepared in late July for the White House spells out three possible outcomes in Iraq, ranging from continuing instability (the most positive) to the outbreak of full-scale civil war.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a prominent national security think tank in Washington, issued a report noting that despite the nominal transfer of sovereignty to the government headed by interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, "Iraq remains embroiled in an insurgency, with security problems overshadowing other efforts to rebuild Iraq's fragile society in the areas of governance and participation, economic opportunity, services and well-being." A similar study by Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs warned that Iraq would be lucky to avoid civil war and that fighting could spread throughout the Middle East.

The Bush administration came under sharp criticism from several leading Senate Republicans at a September 16 hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee on the administration's request to divert \$3.4 billion in appropriated funds from Iraq reconstruction to emergency security measures. Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel commented, "That does not add up, in my opinion, to a pretty picture, to a picture that shows that we're winning. But it does add up to this: an acknowledgment that we are in deep trouble."

The committee chairman, Richard Lugar of Indiana, referred scathingly to the "dancing-in-the-street crowd"—Bush administration officials who predicted that the US invasion would be popular with Iraqis—without stating explicitly that the leader of that "crowd" is Vice President Dick Cheney, who declared on the eve of the war that US troops would be "welcomed as liberators." Lugar added, "The nonsense of that is apparent. The lack of planning is apparent."

Francis Fukuyama, a former sympathizer of the neo-conservative ideologues who spearheaded the Iraq invasion and make up the bulk of the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, criticized Bush

administration strategy in Iraq as “extremely unrealistic” at a September 15 symposium at Johns Hopkins University. Referring to the plan to hold nationwide elections in January with Iraqi forces playing the main security role, he said, “I think that anybody who believes they are going to be able to execute this plan is living in a total fantasyland.”

The growing pessimism about prospects for the US occupation reaches deep within the administration itself. *Newsweek* quoted an unnamed “senior US diplomat in Baghdad” who told the magazine, “We’re dealing with a population that hovers between bare tolerance and outright hostility. This idea of a functioning democracy here is crazy. We thought that there would be a reprieve after sovereignty, but all hell is breaking loose.”

Perhaps the most remarkable testimony to the growing crisis in the occupation regime came in comments from former US military brass, reported by Sidney Blumenthal, the former Clinton White House aide and *Washington Post* reporter who is now Washington bureau chief for the web magazine *Salon*.

In a September 16 column for the British daily *Guardian*, headlined, “Far Graver than Vietnam,” Blumenthal wrote: “Most senior US military officers now believe the war on Iraq has turned into a disaster on an unprecedented scale.” He quoted four military experts, including General William Odom, former head of the National Security Agency; General Joseph Hoare, former Marine Corps commandant and head of US Central Command; Jeffrey Record, professor of strategy at the Air War College; and W. Andrew Terrill, professor at the Army War College’s strategic studies institute. Their comments to Blumenthal follow:

Odom: “Bush hasn’t found the WMD. Al Qaeda, it’s worse, he’s lost on that front. That he’s going to achieve a democracy there? That goal is lost, too. It’s lost. Right now, the course we’re on, we’re achieving Bin Laden’s ends.”

Hoare: “The idea that this is going to go the way these guys planned is ludicrous. There are no good options. We’re conducting a campaign as though it were being conducted in Iowa, no sense of the realities on the ground. It’s so unrealistic for anyone who knows that part of the world. The priorities are just all wrong.”

Record: “I see no ray of light on the horizon at all. The worst case has become true. There’s no analogy whatsoever between the situation in Iraq and the advantages we had after the Second World War in Germany and Japan.”

Terrill: “I don’t think that you can kill the insurgency. We have a growing, maturing insurgency group. We see larger and more coordinated military attacks. They are getting better and they can self-regenerate. The idea there are X number of insurgents, and that when they’re all dead we can get out, is wrong. The insurgency has shown an ability to regenerate itself because there are people willing to fill the ranks of those who are killed. The political culture is more hostile to the US presence. The longer we stay, the more they are confirmed in that view.”

Hoare said that from information he has received—the former member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff undoubtedly retains high-level contacts in the Pentagon—“a decision has been made” to attack Fallujah “after the first Tuesday in November. That’s the cynical part of it—after the election. The signs are all there.”

Odom added, “This is far graver than Vietnam. There wasn’t as much at stake strategically, though in both cases we mindlessly went ahead with the war that was not constructive for US aims. But now we’re in a region far more volatile, and we’re in much worse shape

with our allies.”

He said that only Iran and Al Qaeda had benefited from the US occupation of Iraq, concluding, “Bin Laden could argue with some cogency that our going into Iraq was the equivalent of the Germans in Stalingrad. They defeated themselves by pouring more in there. Tragic.”

These comments come, not from individuals identified with antiwar opinion or political opposition to the Bush administration, but from former top officials responsible for devising or carrying out the military strategy of the US government. They are all the more devastating as a demonstration of the growing crisis which American imperialism faces in Iraq.

The Bush administration’s response to this crisis has already been demonstrated in the massive bloodletting in the streets of Baghdad, Fallujah and other Iraqi cities, carried out by tanks, warplanes, helicopter gunships and other advanced weaponry. Hoare’s warning that the violence will escalate is certainly justified. In fact, the military destruction of Fallujah by American firepower may well come before the election, not after it, if the political situation in Iraq—or in the United States—becomes more desperate for the White House.

Bush himself has made no response either to Annan’s remarks or the other critical comments of the past few days. But he went out of his way to praise Allawi as “a tough prime minister ... a strong guy.” The puppet prime minister—who has been publicly accused of personally executing prisoners under interrogation in Baghdad—is to visit the United States next week for a publicity tour, including an address to Congress and a speech at the UN General Assembly, timed to boost the reelection prospects for his American master.

No one should expect anything different from a Kerry administration, in the event the Democrats win the presidential race. In his remarks this week to the convention of the National Guard in Las Vegas, Kerry solidarized himself with the goal of a US military victory, criticizing Bush for failing to acknowledge the dangers facing the occupation regime in Iraq.

“He did not tell you that with each passing day, we’re seeing more chaos, more violence, indiscriminate killing,” Kerry said, referring to Bush. “He did not tell you that with each passing week, our enemies are getting bolder—that Pentagon officials report that entire regions of Iraq are now in the hands of terrorists and extremists.”

This reference to the Iraqi resistance as “terrorists and extremists” demonstrates that on the central issue in the 2004 election, the war in Iraq, there is no fundamental difference between Bush and Kerry. The struggle against war, in and after the election, requires the development of a political movement of the working class, independent of both the Democrats and Republicans.



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