America's oligarchy in the mirror of the debacle in Iraq

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1 October 2004

Mounting violence and a series of statements by top officials in the Bush administration and the US military command over the past week have given the lie to claims by the US president and his Baghdad puppet, interim prime minister Ayad Allawi, that Iraq is well on its way to stability, democracy and independence.

Just days after Allawi appeared before a joint meeting of Congress to parrot the Bush administration's claims of "steady progress," a report prepared by a private US security contractor cited over 2,300 attacks by Iraqis resisting the US occupation in the last 30 days alone. The report indicated that these attacks—nearly four times the number recorded just last March—-took place in virtually every major population center in the country.

Asked about the fighting in Iraq on television news shows last Sunday, Secretary of State Colin Powell was compelled to acknowledge: "We are fighting an intense insurgency...Yes, it's getting worse." He indicated that the US military is preparing a major new offensive to reoccupy the cities of Ramadi, Samarra and Fallujah.

Confident predictions that elections will be held in January have also been contradicted. Jordan's King Abdullah, one of Washington's most servile allies in the Middle East, told the French newspaper *Le Figaro* it would be "impossible...to organize indisputable elections in the chaos we see today." He further predicted that the likely victor in such a vote would be "extremists."

General John Abizaid, the chief of US Central Command told a US Senate panel "we're going to have to fight our way all the way through elections, and there will be a lot of violence between now and then."

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that if violence made it impossible to set up polls in as much as a quarter of the country, "So be it." He added, "You have the rest of the election and you go on. Life's not perfect."

No indeed! It would be as if the three largest American states—California, Texas and New York—were written out of the upcoming presidential election. That the administration finds this acceptable only confirms the obvious: the elections will be a sham, designed solely to consolidate a US-controlled puppet regime.

US military commanders have refuted claims made by Bush and Allawi that the struggle in Iraq is the front line in the global "war on terrorism," with US troops confronting hordes of foreign fighters pouring into the country. According to the top brass, US troops are confronting an indigenous resistance movement. General Abizaid put the number of so-called foreign fighters in Iraq at less than 1,000. Conservative Pentagon estimates have put the number of active resistance fighters at 20,000.

"They say these guys are flowing across [the border] and fomenting all this violence. We don't think so," a senior US military official told the *Los Angeles Times*. "What's the main threat? It's internal."

A year and a half after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, resistance to the US occupation has increased exponentially. How is the explosive growth of this "internal threat" to be explained?

Washington has managed to turn the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi population against it in a remarkably short period. Reports indicate not only that the ranks of those taking up arms against the US have swelled, but that their actions have the support of broad masses of people, who shun collaboration with American authorities.

Even efforts to train Iraqi security forces—touted as the ultimate solution to the escalating catastrophe—are fatally undermined, because many of those who are being armed and trained secretly sympathize—and in many cases actively collaborate—with the resistance. Just last week, US authorities arrested a senior commander of the newly formed Iraqi National Guard, accusing him of having ties with "known insurgents."

The American public is regularly assured that the escalating eruption of violence in Iraq is the work of a small minority driven either by loyalty to the former Baathist regime—whose principals have for the most part been killed or captured by US forces—or by Islamist fanaticism, or by criminality. Those fighting US forces are, in the words of Vice President Cheney, "the enemies of the civilized world."

In a report Wednesday, the Reuters news agency offered a different explanation for this hostility to the "civilized world," saying that "heavy-handed military tactics have fueled hatred of American troops and boosted the ranks of insurgents."

It quoted a resident of Fallujah, Abu Ghnem Awuud, whose wife and five children were slaughtered in one of the daily US air strikes against the city. Offered monetary compensation for the killing of his entire family, he told a US officer: "Is this the logic of your civilization? How can money compensate me for the loss of my family? I await compensation from God to kill all of you in Iraq."

These words captured sentiments that have spread throughout Iraq as the US military has turned tanks, heavy weapons, aerial gunships, and assault helicopters against heavily populated areas from Baghdad's Sadr City to Najaf, Fallujah and elsewhere. Those who have buried the bodies of their families or rushed their burned and maimed children to overwhelmed hospitals have ample cause for rejecting the "civilization" on offer from Washington.

Thousands more have been rounded up in counterinsurgency sweeps, humiliated before their families and taken hooded to prison camps such as the infamous Abu Ghraib, where many have been subjected to torture, beatings and rape. Military commanders have admitted that the overwhelming majority of those detained were guilty

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of nothing more than having crossed paths with a US military patrol.

"I supported the arrival of the US forces in the hopes that we would live in freedom and prosperity," a man released after four months in Abu Ghraib told Reuters. "I have never regretted anything in my life as much as I regret welcoming the Americans."

The hideous photographs of the torture and sexual abuse of the Abu Ghraib prisoners will be one of the most enduring legacies of the US invasion of Iraq. The shocking images will endure because what they depict was not confined to one cellblock or one detention camp. Brutality, backwardness and racism pervade the entire illegal war and colonialist venture launched by the US in Iraq, and they have generated an armed resistance that will not cease until every US soldier is withdrawn from the country.

The decision to conquer Iraq—at the cost of tens of thousands of lives—was driven by a determination to grab control of territory that held the potential for yielding immense profits. From the first days of the occupation, when US authorities deliberately allowed mass looting and destruction to occur in order to smash up the previous structures of state control over the economy, the constant aim of the so-called "reconstruction" of Iraq has been to privatize the oil industry and bring it under the control of US-based oil giants.

Control over this strategic resource would not only secure supplies needed by the US economy, but also give Washington the power to place its actual and potential international rivals on energy rations.

It is well understood by Iraqis that the US invaded their country because it sits on top of the world's second largest petroleum reserves—and this knowledge has further fueled their resistance. To this day, however, the American media deny the obvious, treating oil as an incidental question and deriding any suggestion that it was a prime motive for the war.

No serious analysis of the Iraq war is possible without acknowledging the geo-strategic interests pursued by US imperialism. Weapons of mass destruction were an issue in the Iraq war only to the extent that Washington was aware they did not exist, and that the country was defenseless in a war to expropriate its abundant natural wealth. Terrorism served as a useful pretext for frightening the American people into accepting a war of aggression. As for the phony crusade for democracy and freedom in the Middle East, it has yielded a puppet regime headed by a murderous thug, the former Baathist hit-man and CIA agent Allawi.

The Bush administration came into office with plans for a war of conquest against Iraq already well advanced. Six months before the September 11 attacks, Vice President Cheney was directing his secretive energy task force, a body that brought together the administration and top executives of major American energy companies.

As documents pried loose from the administration by court order have shown, one of the key topics this task force discussed was Iraq. Cheney and his former oil industry colleagues were pouring over maps of Iraq's oilfields and reviewing plans of their foreign rivals—Royal Dutch/Shell, Total Elf Aquitaine, Lukoil and others—to secure concessions from the Saddam Hussein regime to exploit these fields. The US invasion ensured that these plans never reached fruition.

Even before the first US troops entered Iraq, the US drew up its own plans for the exploitation of Iraq's huge petroleum reserves. In February 2003, the US Agency for International Development completed a blueprint for the privatization of Iraq's public sector enterprises, particularly its state-run oil industry.

It is the resistance of the Iraqi people that has stymied these plans. No US companies, outside of the military contractors supplying mercenaries and ferrying supplies for the US occupation, dare operate in Iraq. As for the oil sector, continuous attacks by the resistance on pipelines and other parts of the oil infrastructure have inflicted an estimated $1 billion in losses this year.

To the extent that profits have been made in Iraq, they have come from padded military contracts and the diversion of funds supposedly meant for reconstruction into the coffers of US corporations. Out of the $18.4 billion budgeted by Congress a year ago for that purpose, only about $1 billion has been spent. According to one recent study, less than 30 percent of this money has been spent on Iraq, with the rest paying for security, profits and US employees' salaries. Hundreds of millions have been lost to embezzlement and mismanagement.

An air of corruption and greed hangs over the entire US venture in Iraq. While invoking right-wing ideology and Christian fundamentalism to justify cruelty against the Iraqi people, Washington has pursued policies that amount to colonialism on the cheap, pursuing reckless policies aimed at achieving only the shortest-term objectives and interests. The results have proven catastrophic.

Behind the official White House triumphalism, there is a growing air of demoralization within the political establishment over what is widely viewed as a debacle in Iraq. The Kerry campaign in recent weeks has attempted to appeal to these sentiments within ruling circles. He attributes the mounting violence and chaos in Iraq to incompetence on the part of Bush and his subordinates, while claiming that he can conduct a more effective war.

But the source of this debacle goes far deeper. The ugly character of the occupation is a reflection of America's ruling oligarchy and its methods. It embodies the criminality and rapaciousness with which the financial elite in the US has accumulated obscene levels of wealth, as well as its contempt for the problems and sentiments of the masses of working people, both at home and abroad.

The disaster that US imperialism has created in Iraq manifests the internal rot of an entire social system.

The struggle to end the war in Iraq cannot be waged successfully outside of a fight for the revolutionary transformation of American society. This means working people mobilizing in their own independent party to fight for the socialist reorganization of society, subordinating the drive for profit and the accumulation of personal wealth to the needs and aspirations of the billions of people across the planet who produce that wealth.

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