

US Democrat Biden advocates the communal break-up of Iraq

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The “five point alternative plan” for Iraq put forward last week by Joseph R. Biden, the ranking Democrat member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, can best be described as a proposal for a sectarian bloodbath. He has joined others in the US political establishment whose solution to the catastrophe in Iraq is to tear the country apart along ethno-religious lines and—providing they collaborate with Washington—put anti-democratic regimes in power over the population.

Biden is a thoroughly pro-war figure. In 2002, he voted in the Congress to give Bush the authority to carry out the illegal invasion of Iraq. He has vehemently defended the White House’s criminal policy of preemptive wars. The Democrats as a whole have provided crucial support for the militarist agenda of the Bush administration. Biden’s main criticism of the Iraq war is that the White House did not send enough troops.

Three years after the invasion, Biden, like a growing layer in American ruling circles, is alarmed about the state of affairs in Iraq. The US military is bogged down fighting against anti-occupation insurgents. Over 20,000 troops have been killed or wounded, while the cost of the conflict is approaching \$100 billion per year. There is no viable government in Baghdad and, far from the situation beginning to stabilise, the efforts of the Bush administration to weaken resistance by encouraging sectarian divisions have triggered fratricidal warfare between Sunni and Shiite extremists.

Biden’s concern, spelt out in an op-ed contribution in *New York Times* on May 1, is that the nightmare the Bush administration has created in Iraq is shattering domestic support for the war. He fears that the “frustration of Americans is mounting so fast that Congress might end up mandating a rapid pullout”. Such an eventuality would threaten what he considers “key security goals” of American imperialism. While Biden did not spell them out, those goals are US domination over the territory and oil and gas resources of the Middle East.

Biden’s solution to the disaster facing the United States is

to split Iraq into three autonomous statelets within a loose federal structure. He advocates “giving each ethno-religious group—Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab—room to run its own affairs, while leaving the central government in charge of common interests”. Alongside the de-facto Kurdish state that already exists in northern Iraq, he calls for the creation of a Shiite-controlled autonomous region in the oil-rich southern provinces and a Sunni Arab region in the central and western provinces.

The new Iraqi constitution that was drafted by pro-occupation Shiite and Kurdish parties and the US embassy enables such a partition to take place. It provides the mechanisms for the establishment of regions and gives control over all new oil fields to the regional governments, not the federal authority in Baghdad. Washington’s plan was to create Shiite and Kurdish regions that would provide a stable basis for American corporations to begin the wholesale exploitation of Iraq’s untapped oil reserves—the second largest in the world.

Thus far, this has not been possible. Sunni-based parties and organisations have bitterly opposed the constitution, as most of the country’s oil and gas fields are located in the south and north. A Sunni region in the centre would face the risk of being cut out of a share in the revenues. The predominantly Sunni Arab resistance groups regularly carry out successful attacks on oil refineries and pipelines across the country. The northern oil fields are barely able to operate. Iraqi oil production is declining, while the general insecurity has made companies reluctant to invest.

Biden proposes the US overcome the problem posed by the Sunni insurgency through bribery. He is calling for the rewriting of Iraq’s constitution to mandate the allocation of 20 percent of the revenue from existing and new oilfields to the Sunni region. This, he seems to think, will be enough to buy off a section of the Sunni guerrillas and undermine the resistance.

Biden’s unstated assumption is that each of the regions will be ruled over by communalist tendencies—the Kurdish nationalists and Sunni and Shiite fundamentalist parties. He

is well aware that this would mean the imposition of the barbaric dictums of sharia law in the Shiite south and put minorities in danger. Biden proposes only that US aid should be linked to “respect” for the rights of minorities and women. “*Widespread violations* [emphasis added],” he wrote in the *New York Times*, should “stop the cash flow”.

With three totalitarian statelets in place, each with their own security forces, Biden suggests the US military could carry out a staged withdrawal by 2008, leaving only a 20,000-strong force to “combat terrorists” and prevent Iraq’s neighbours such as Iran, Syria and Turkey from “picking at its pieces”.

Biden’s arrogance and ignorance rivals anything that has come out of the Bush White House. He is proposing that the United States redraws the map of the Middle East as though all that is involved is marking some new lines in the sand. His plan, however, would dramatically exacerbate sectarian and regional tensions.

Every major city and town of Iraq has residents of differing ethnic and religious backgrounds. If statelets were created on Biden’s ethno-religious criteria, it would inevitably lead to Shiites fleeing or being driven from the Sunni region; Sunnis from Shiite areas; and Arabs from the Kurdish north. Ethnic cleansing is already taking place on a scale that is beginning to rival what occurred during the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. At least 100,000 people have been forced from their homes.

The implications of Biden’s plan for the six million people who live in Baghdad are horrifying. The millions of Shiites who live in the capital—which Biden proposes should be declared a “federal zone”—would be surrounded by a Sunni region from where extremists would be able to launch sectarian attacks. The consequences would be reprisals and counter-reprisals. Already, militias and death squads are slaughtering as many as 1,000 people a month in the city.

Sectarian conflict in Iraq has the potential to ignite a broader conflict as neighbouring states felt compelled to intervene on one side or another. Turkey, in particular, has consistently threatened to use military force to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish state due to fears that it would fuel separatist sentiment among its own Kurdish minority. The fate of the Turkish-speaking Turkomen minority in Iraqi Kurdistan could be used as the pretext for an invasion.

The Iranian Shiite theocracy would also be drawn into the sectarian conflict in Iraq, with signs it is already assisting the Shiite parties that dominate the government to repress the resistance of Sunni-based movements.

The Arab states would come under pressure to intervene. They are opposed to the emergence of a Shiite statelet in southern Iraq with strong economic and political ties with the Iranian regime. The Sunni ruling elite in Saudi Arabia

has the greatest concerns. A Shiite state on its border may encourage separatist tendencies among Saudi Shiites, who make up some 10 percent of the population and predominantly live in the oil-rich region of the country that adjoins Iraq.

The fears of the Arab bourgeoisie were openly aired by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in April. He declared that Shiites were “mostly always loyal to Iran and not the countries where they live” and that Iran “has an influence over Shiites who make up 65 percent of Iraq’s population”. Any partition of Iraq could prove be the prelude to a regional war.

Biden’s proposal is part of a broader discussion in US think-tanks and military circles over Iraq policy. One analyst interviewed recently by the *Washington Post*, former marine colonel T.X. Hammes, gave the chilling assessment that the division of Iraq would trigger “major ethnic and sectarian massacres such as occurred in the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan”. This, he warned, would be too expensive for the US occupation to try and stop.

This extraordinary reference to the end of the British Raj only highlights the colonial character of the US occupation of Iraq and the murderous nature of what is being proposed. The communal partition of India by Britain, in league with the Indian bourgeoisie, was aimed at dividing the mass anti-colonial movement to preserve capitalism and British interests. It resulted in the deaths of millions in the resulting sectarian violence.

The defenders of US imperialism—whether Republican or Democrat like Biden—are advocating the same criminal strategy in the Middle East. People are being pitted against one another according to their religion or ethnicity to try to prevent a unified struggle by the masses against the US attempt to take control of the region and its energy resources.



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