

Bush administration elaborates plans for bloodbath in Iraq

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Reports on the Bush administration's discussions on a change of course in Iraq indicate that Washington is preparing a major new bloodbath as part of a desperate attempt to salvage its nearly four-year-old bid to conquer the oil-rich country.

The *New York Times* Sunday carried an article entitled "The Capital Awaits a Masterstroke on Iraq," which indicated that the options under discussion include what amounts to support for a genocidal war against Iraq's Sunni population as well as the deliberate unleashing of a region-wide sectarian conflict between the predominantly Sunni Arab countries and the Shia majorities in Iran and Iraq.

This proposal—known widely in Washington as the "80 percent solution," the percentage of the Iraqi population comprising Shia and Kurds—the *Times* writes, "basically says that Washington should stop trying to get Sunnis and Shiites to get along and instead just back the Shiites, since there are more of them anyway and they're likely to win in a fight to the death. After all, the proposal goes, Iraq is 65 percent Shiite and only 20 percent Sunni."

The plan reportedly has been promoted by Vice President Dick Cheney, one of the principal architects of the Iraq war from the beginning.

A key consideration, the article adds, is control of Iraq's oil fields. "The longer America tries to woo the Sunnis, the more it risks alienating the Shiites and Kurds, and they're the ones with the oil," the *Times* states. "A handful of administration officials have argued that Iraq is not going to hold together and will splinter along sectarian lines. If so, they say, American interests dictate backing the groups who control the oil-rich areas."

An off-shoot of the plan, which the *Times* cynically describes as something "some hawks have tossed out in meetings," is a suggestion that the US could reap the benefits of a region-wide sectarian conflagration. "America could actually hurt Iran by backing Iraq's Shiites; that could deepen the Shiite-Sunni split and eventually lead to a regional Shiite-Sunni war," the *Times* writes. "And in that, the Shiites—and Iran—lose because, while there are more Shiites than Sunnis in Iraq and Iran, there are more Sunnis than Shiites almost everywhere else."

At the same time, there are growing indications that a proposed "surge" of tens of thousands more American combat

troops into Iraq will have as its first objective taking on the militia loyal to radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, meaning a brutal assault on the impoverished Shia masses of Baghdad.

The formulation of such mutually contradictory policies appears to be less the product of diplomatic and military calculation than political insanity. Underlying what seems like madness is the desperation and disorientation at all levels of the American state over the deep crisis that its policy has produced.

What predominates is the conception that provided it carries out a sufficient level of killing—whether in a genocidal slaughter of Sunnis, a bloodletting against the Shia, or a combination of the two—US imperialism can somehow extricate itself from a humiliating defeat in Iraq.

The leaks concerning the strategies now under consideration only underscore the abject criminality of the war as well as the desperate crisis that is gripping the American political establishment, which remains deeply divided over how to confront the political and military debacle confronting the US occupation.

Less than two weeks after the release of the report by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, the Bush administration has repudiated the panel's prescriptions for reducing the US military role in Iraq and pursuing diplomatic initiatives aimed at winning cooperation from the neighboring countries of Iran and Syria.

The White House, backed by the Republican right and the most ruthless sections of the American ruling elite, is instead preparing what amounts to a re-invasion of the ravaged country and the pursuit of a broader regional war, ultimately aimed at toppling both the Iranian and the Syrian regimes.

It was reported late last week that the Pentagon has already ordered the 3,500 troops of the Second Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, currently based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to prepare for deployment to Kuwait next month. This would be the first contingent for what is anticipated to be a "surge" of between 30,000 and 50,000 additional troops.

Not only is the political establishment deeply divided over the way forward in Iraq, but the US military command as well. Some, such as Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, the Army's chief of staff, Gen. George Casey, the top commander in Iraq, and Gen. John Abizaid, the senior commander of US forces in the Middle

East, have questioned the value of a “surge” of American troops into Iraq, noting that such an increased deployment could not be sustained and warning that it could serve to further delay Iraqi forces taking over security operations.

On the other hand, a number of recently retired senior commanders have advocated the escalation, and the scheme is reportedly supported by Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, who assumed command of combat troops in Iraq last week. Odierno commanded the Army’s 4th Infantry Division in Anbar Province in 2003 and 2004, gaining a reputation for heavy-handed counterinsurgency operations and repression that is credited by many with generating much of the popular support for the Iraqi resistance.

“We are going to go after any—any—individual who attacks the government, who attacks the security forces and who attacks coalition forces no matter who they are and no matter who they are associated with,” he said at a ceremony in Baghdad last Thursday.

The remark appeared to be a warning that the immediate target of the new offensive now being prepared will be the Mahdi Army, the Shia militia loyal to Moqtada al-Sadr. According to press reports, the Pentagon’s uniformed command has been unanimous on its insistence that any increased deployment in Baghdad be accompanied by unrestricted rules of engagement for US forces going after Sadr’s followers.

Such an offensive would signal not only a US-engineered coup against the current Iraqi government, in which Sadr’s movement holds substantial power, but also a massive loss of civilian life, as an all-out war would be waged in the crowded Shia slums of Baghdad’s Sadr City.

Barely six weeks after growing popular opposition to the war in Iraq produced a stunning defeat for the Bush administration at the polls, there is every indication that the White House intends not only to continue the war, but to escalate it substantially.

The Democratic leadership, meanwhile, exhibits no such conviction or determination as it prepares to assume the leadership next month of both houses of the US Congress.

On Sunday, incoming Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid declared in a television interview that he is prepared to support the proposed “surge” in Iraqi troop deployment if it served as part of a broader strategy to achieve the Baker-Hamilton commission’s proposal for reducing the number of troops in Iraq by early 2008.

“If the commanders on the ground said this is just for a short period of time, we’ll go along with that,” Reid said, adding that an escalation for two to three months would be acceptable, but not one that dragged on for 18 months or 24 months.

The Democratic Senate leader’s qualms were dismissed by one of the prominent advocates of the “surge,” former Army vice chief of staff Gen. Jack Keane, who pointed out, “It will take a couple of months just to get forces in.” Keane said that it

would take at least one and half years for an expanded force to suppress Iraqi resistance.

Meanwhile, Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, considered the most liberal Democrat in the US Senate, appearing on the Fox News channel, voiced opposition to the increased troop deployment, but rejected any move to cut off funding for the war—the only means, short of impeachment, that the Democrats have to rein in the escalating militarism of the Bush administration.

“One thing about the Democrats is we will support the troops,” Kennedy declared, adding, “We are not going to pull the line, in terms of the troops.”

Pressed by interviewer Chris Wallace as to why he was unprepared to support a vote to defund the war in Iraq, when Democrats had pursued just such a course during the Vietnam War, Kennedy stressed that “This is a different situation than Vietnam” and “we are not at this point at this time.”

What is different is that in Iraq, decisive sections of America’s ruling elite remain determined to pursue the goal of establishing US domination over one of the largest reserves of petroleum in the world by means of military force and colonial-style domination.

While there are intense divisions over how this goal is to be pursued, the defense of the geo-strategic interests of American capitalism is upheld by every faction of the political establishment. It is for this reason that the Democrats have served as the Bush administration’s accomplice in this war since voting to authorize an unprovoked invasion more than four years ago.

The growing threats to escalate the assault against the Iraqi people and potentially unleash a conflagration that could spread throughout the Middle East and worldwide demonstrate that the popular opposition to the war cannot find expression through the present two-party political set up in America.

Even before the new Congress convenes, it has become starkly apparent that the struggle to end the war in Iraq and to hold those who are responsible for launching this war politically and criminally responsible can be advanced only through the emergence of a new independent political movement of working people in opposition to the American financial oligarchy and both of its parties.



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