

White House, Democrats reported in “compromise” talks on Iraqi partition

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Top Bush administration officials have reportedly opened up talks with leading congressional Democrats aimed at forging a “compromise” plan for reducing US troop levels in Iraq that is predicated on the country’s partition along sectarian lines.

These discussions, first reported Sunday by the *Los Angeles Times*, are said to involve both US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Washington’s former ambassador to Baghdad, Zalmay Khalilzad, who now represents the US at the United Nations.

Citing unnamed government officials, the *LA Times* said that these two and others “have been quietly talking with lawmakers about how to adjust policy in the months ahead.” The report added, “Among other ideas, they have discussed whether the United States should advocate a sharply decentralized Iraq, a notion that has seen a resurgence on Capitol Hill.”

The newspaper account cast the informal talks as an attempt by the administration to preempt another partisan debate on the war like the one that accompanied the congressional vote last month, in which the Democrats engaged in weeks of antiwar posturing before delivering the votes required to pass the \$120 billion “emergency” war funding bill sought by the White House.

It quoted an unnamed administration official as stating that President Bush and other top officials in the administration “realize they can’t keep fighting this over and over.”

The Democratic congressional leadership has indicated that it will renew its bid to attach language proposing timetables for the partial withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and limiting the length and conditions of deployments in the occupied country.

Leading Republicans as well have indicated that they are expecting a shift in course by September, when the top US military commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus, and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker are set to give reports to Congress on the progress of the military “surge” that has deployed an additional 30,000 troops in the country, and on the level of compliance by the Iraqi puppet regime with “benchmarks” set in Washington.

The reported talks are presented by the *LA Times* largely as a matter of party politics, with the newspaper noting that “the odds of compromise are long,” given the Bush administration’s refusal to accept any withdrawal that would “imperil Iraq” and

the Democrats’ reluctance to “sacrifice a crucial 2008 campaign issue if they agreed to a deal with the White House.”

However, the reported talks between the administration and congressional leaders on an alternative policy based on the ethno-religious partition of Iraq have far more significant implications. They provide an indication of the growing desperation within the American political establishment over the deepening debacle in Iraq and a warning as to the level of criminality to which Washington is prepared to resort in order to secure its interests there.

The apparent willingness of senior administration officials to discuss with congressional leaders proposals for Iraq’s partition comes in the context of the failure of the surge to quell resistance to the US occupation or reduce overall violence in Iraq, while American casualties are hitting record levels.

On the day after the publication of the *LA Times* report, a suicide bomber struck a meeting of US-aligned tribal leaders at a central Baghdad hotel, killing 13 and wounding dozens more. Meanwhile, the past week saw at least 30 US troops killed and many more wounded.

Senior military officers have warned that the present surge cannot be maintained indefinitely without pushing the current strain on the US armed forces to the breaking point.

The proposal to partition Iraq is designed to divide the country into three autonomous mini-states ruled along sectarian lines by the three largest ethno-religious groups—Shia in the south, Sunnis in the center and west and Kurds in the north. It envisions US troops—albeit in substantially reduced numbers—continuing to occupy the country indefinitely on the pretext of conducting “counter-terror” operations, training Iraqi forces and protecting US interests.

All of the so-called “antiwar” bills proposed by the Democratic leadership before it capitulated fully to White House demands also included provisions for this “reduced mission,” which would undoubtedly involve the continued deployment of tens of thousands of American soldiers and Marines in Iraq.

Senator Joseph Biden, a Democrat from Delaware and chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has been the most vocal proponent of the partition plan. According to the *LA Times* report, UN Ambassador Khalilzad, who left the embassy

in Baghdad in April, has organized discussions on the plan with Biden and his co-sponsor of legislation proposing partition, the right-wing Republican Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas. Both men are seeking the presidential nomination of their respective parties.

Also sponsoring the legislation are Democratic Senators Barbara Boxer of California and Bill Nelson of Florida, as well as Republican Senators Gordon Smith of Oregon and Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas.

Other Republicans have voiced cautious interest in the plan. Maine Senator Susan Collins, a moderate Republican, made one of the more revealing comments on the proposal. “It’s essentially giving federal approval to ethnic cleansing,” she said. “On the other hand, nothing seems to be working.”

Ethnic cleansing is the inevitable result of the Biden plan, and its supporters routinely cite the breakup of the former Yugoslavia as the model for their proposal.

In Iraq, such an ethnic-territorial division has horrific implications. Before the 2003 US invasion, fully one third of all marriages in Iraq were between Shia and Sunni. Every major city in Iraq is multi-ethnic, and the proposal for partition would turn each of them into far more bloody battlegrounds than they are today.

Substantial minority populations, like the hundreds of thousands of Turkomans concentrated in the area of Kirkuk, would be disenfranchised and prey to expulsion as part of this partition. Their plight would bring with it an increased potential of Turkish intervention against the Kurdish state.

The essential attraction of such a plan for those in the administration and the US Senate who are now reportedly discussing it is not its prospect for reducing sectarian violence in Iraq—just the opposite would be the inevitable result. Rather, it is a classic example of the old colonial strategy of divide and rule being played out once again in the Middle East.

The division of the country into three relatively powerless statelets would pave the way for the carve-up of Iraq’s oil resources by US-based energy conglomerates, which would dictate their own deals to the newly “autonomous” regions.

The seeds for such a political dismemberment have already been planted. First, the occupation authority headed by L. Paul Bremer institutionalized the division of the spoils within the Iraqi puppet regime along ethnic lines. This was followed by the adoption of a new constitution in 2005 which included the right of “regions” to form their own security forces and manage their natural resources.

The drive to implement a new oil law—the most important benchmark imposed by Washington on the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki—only serves to deepen sectarian divisions.

The announcement Monday that the new US-dictated law had been approved by the Iraqi cabinet and would go to the parliament for debate was accompanied by a storm of criticism that the al-Maliki government had caved in to pressure from

Kurdish separatists to cede even greater control over the distribution of oil revenues.

The law opens up Iraq’s oil sector to exploitation by foreign corporations for the first time since the early 1970s. Critics of the law have warned that it will represent a profit bonanza for foreign energy conglomerates, while depriving Iraq of both control over its resource and the lion’s share of the benefits derived from its exploitation.

Issam al-Chalabi, who served as Iraq’s petroleum minister from 1978 to 1990, told the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* that the new law is a “ready-made recipe to divide Iraq.”

The concept of partition has been most actively promoted by supposed “liberals” identified with the Democratic Party, such as Peter Galbraith, the former US ambassador to Croatia under Clinton, and Leslie Gelb, a former assistant secretary of state in the Carter administration and columnist for the *New York Times*, both of whom have written extensively on the proposal.

Biden, while posturing as a critic of the Bush administration over the Iraq war, himself voted for the 2002 resolution authorizing the US invasion and has voiced his full support for the illegal policy of “preventive war.” His central criticism of the White House was the failure to send in more troops after the US invasion of 2003.

That Biden’s plan for carving up Iraq is now getting a greater hearing within the Bush administration is only another indication that the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are prepared to carry out the most heinous crimes against the Iraqi people in pursuit of the key objective that has driven the war from its outset: the securing of unchallenged US hegemony over the Middle East and its strategic energy resources.



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