

# Iraq's tragic encounter with US imperialism

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27 December 2011

The withdrawal of American combat troops from Iraq after nearly nine years of military occupation has been accompanied by a surge in sectarian tensions and violence that threatens to escalate into civil war. Following the explosions that ravaged Baghdad last week, there have been further attacks on government buildings in the capital and bombings and killings in the volatile cities of Fallujah, Mosul and Kirkuk.

The national unity government made up of rival sectarian- and ethnic-based factions has collapsed. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the representative of the dominant Shiite political bloc, has issued an arrest warrant against Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, accusing him of directing sectarian terrorism. Sunni parties are boycotting the parliament and their ministers have walked out of the cabinet. They have accused Maliki of seeking to establish a dictatorship, and their leader, Iyad Allawi, has called for intervention by the US, Turkey and the Arab League.

There can be no doubt that the US State Department, the CIA and other intelligence agencies, operating from the massive American embassy in central Baghdad, are active participants in the political crisis. The Obama administration and the US military agreed to remove all combat troops, as stipulated in the Status of Forces agreement reached in 2008, only after they failed to bully the Iraqi regime into allowing thousands of troops to remain under a blanket exemption from prosecution under Iraqi law. None of the Iraqi parties could support such a demand because of massive popular hostility toward the US occupation.

Events are now beginning to spiral out of control. Hashemi has taken refuge in the autonomous Kurdish region in the north and the Kurdish establishment have rejected Maliki's demands that they hand over the Sunni official. The Sunni leadership of Anbar province, where Fallujah is located, has joined with the majority Sunni provinces of Diyala and Salahaddin in

announcing that it wants the same autonomous status as the Kurdish region.

Maliki declared Saturday that he would oppose the autonomy moves, warning that it would lead to "dividing Iraq and to rivers of blood." Troops and militias loyal to the Shiite parties have deployed across Baghdad and are massing near other major cities such as Mosul. There is little doubt that Sunni militias are mobilising and that the Kurdish armed forces have been placed on alert.

Just two weeks ago, US President Barack Obama declared Iraq to be a country "that is self-governing, that is inclusive, and that has enormous potential." In reality, a war fought on the most reactionary communalist lines is looming, potentially providing the pretext for some form of new US-led intervention in Iraq. The conspiracies, assassinations and bombings taking place all have the character of black operations intended to destabilise the country.

At least 40,000 American troops, backed by an array of aircraft, are currently based in Kuwait, Bahrain and elsewhere in the Middle East.

From the beginning, the US intervention in Iraq has had one primary aim: to ensure that its large oil and natural gas reserves were brought under US corporate domination and American military control. To achieve that end, the American occupation regime ruthlessly stoked sectarian and ethnic divisions to prevent the emergence of a unified movement among the Iraqi people against US imperialism.

The disbandment of the entire Iraqi Army and the illegalisation of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party in the first weeks of the occupation were intended to disempower the largely Sunni Muslim ruling elite. Despite their close links to Iran, Shiite religious parties were elevated in place of their Sunni counterparts, providing they helped repress Iraqi Shiites who were organising to resist. The north of the country was

handed over to a venal Kurdish elite as a private fiefdom in exchange for their provision of Kurdish forces to assist the US military.

At every point, sectarian violence was used to weaken the anti-occupation insurgency. The February 2006 bombing of the Shiite Askiriya shrine by unknown assailants was blamed on Sunni extremists and seized upon by the Shiite-dominated government and security forces to unleash a frenzy of killings throughout the suburbs of Baghdad. The US military stood by as thousands of Sunni men and boys were hideously tortured and their bodies dumped in the streets.

As Iraq once again lurches toward potential disintegration, it is worth recalling that the carnage ravaging the country in 2006 was used as the pretext by then-Senator, now Vice President, Joseph Biden to advance a plan for the sectarian partition of the country. Biden advocated the establishment of Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish statelets as a divide-and-rule strategy that would enable the US to withdraw most of its troops while keeping control over Iraq and its resources.

The Bush administration decided instead to implement the so-called surge, sending tens of thousands additional US troops and intensifying the repression of the Iraqi population, particularly in Sunni areas. The increased American operations, combined with the mass murder carried by Shiite death squads, effectively drowned the insurgency in blood by the end of 2008. Partition, however, always remained a potential fall-back option.

The US occupation of the country has amounted to a conscious policy of sociocide—the destruction of the very fabric of a society. Formerly mixed suburbs have been transformed into sectarian enclaves, and the people have been traumatised by bitter memories of communal violence. The Iraqi population as a whole has been left to endure radioactive and other forms of contamination, dysfunctional water and electricity supplies, a ruined health and education system, and the loss of a large proportion of an entire generation of men. Well over one million people were killed, with millions more wounded and still more millions turned into refugees.

Crimes of immense proportions have been carried out by the Bush and Obama administrations to ensure American domination of Iraq and the Middle East. The last thing that the withdrawal of troops signifies is the

exit of the US from the long-suffering country. It can be said with certainty that State Department and intelligence operatives are intriguing to ensure that US interests are served, if necessary through the promotion of sectarian conflicts and dismemberment of the country.

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