

IRAQ AND BEYOND

Three Articles on the Occupation and the Movement



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Seven theses on the current period, the war and the anti-war movement

Gilbert Achcar

1. The Iraq occupation is entirely in keeping with the expansionist "grand strategy" initiated by the USA at the end of the Cold War.

The end of the USSR was a major turning point in history, equal in importance to the end of the 20th century's two world wars. Each of these turning points ushered in a further phase of US imperial expansion. With the First World War, the USA graduated from its status as a regional or minor world power to that of a major world power. It went on to become a superpower following the Second World War, within the framework of a bipolar world, divided up between the two empires of the Cold War.

The decay and final implosion of the USSR confronted the USA with the need to choose between major strategic options about "shaping" the post-Cold War world. Washington decided to perpetuate its supremacy, in a world that had become unipolar in the area of military force, where it held a major advantage in the global competition between imperialist states. The era of US hyperpower was inaugurated by the first Bush administration's war against Iraq in January-February 1991, the year of the USSR's final collapse.

The 1991 war was decisive for "shaping the world." It enabled the USA to simultaneously fulfill a number of major strategic objectives:

- a massive return of direct US military involvement in the Gulf region, home to two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. We are at the beginning of a century which will see a growing shortage and exhaustion of this most strategic of resources. The return to the Gulf has given the USA a dominant position in relation to both allies and potential rivals, all of whom -- save for Russia -- are hugely dependent on oil from the Middle East.
- a striking demonstration of the crushing superiority of US weaponry over the new dangers facing the world capitalist order in the form of "rogue states" -- dangers exemplified by the predatory behavior of Baathist-run Iraq, and the precedent of the

"Islamic Revolution" in Iran which had brought to power a regime evading control by the two Cold War superpowers. This show of force played a key role in convincing Washington's key allies -- the European powers and Japan -- of the need to renew the vassalage relationship that had been established following the Second World War between themselves and their new American overlord. Upholding NATO and transforming it into a "security organization" were part and parcel of the renewal of this hierarchical relationship.

At the same time, the US return to the Middle East inaugurated a new and final historic phase in the development of Washington's global empire. The US could now extend the network of military bases and alliances with which it encircled the globe, to those regions of the planet that had previously escaped its control because they had been under Moscow's domination. NATO expansion to Eastern Europe, armed intervention in Bosnia, and the Kosovo war were the first stages of this completion of imperial globalization, carried out under the Clinton administration. Successful pursuit of this process required favorable political conditions, especially given the persistence of the "Vietnam syndrome" which hampered Washington's expansionist military ambitions.

2. The September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks provided the administration of George W. Bush with an historic opportunity to dramatically accelerate and complete this process in the name of the "war on terror."

The invasion of Afghanistan and the war against the Al-Qaida network were the ideal pretext for the expansion of US military power into the heart of formerly Soviet-controlled Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) and the Caucasus (Georgia). Aside from the oil and gas riches of the Caspian Basin, Central Asia provides the inestimable strategic interest of being located at the heart of the Eurasian landmass -- between Russia and China, the two main potential adversaries of US political and military hegemony.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq aimed to complete work that had remained unfinished in 1991 due to the impossibility at that time of embarking upon a long-term occupation of the country -- for reasons of both international (the limited UN mandate, the existence of the USSR) and domestic politics (public reluctance, a limited mandate from Congress). With its occupation of Iraq, its ongoing domination of the Saudi kingdom and military presence in the other emirates of the Gulf region, the US now has direct control of more than half of the planet's oil reserves, in addition to its own domestic reserves. Washington is actively seeking to further tighten this global grip on oil resources by spreading its hegemony to Iran and Venezuela, its priority targets after Iraq.

3. The strategic decision to pursue and complete US unipolar domination of the world is the corollary of the neoliberal orientation adopted by global capitalism and imposed on the entire planet through the general process encapsulated by the term "globalization."

In order to guarantee free access for the USA and its partners in the global imperialist system to the resources and markets of the rest of the world, it is of vital importance to build up and maintain military forces up to the task. Such forces are also essential to guard against the non-economic threats to the system and markets created by the

neoliberal agenda of social cutbacks, extreme privatization and savage competition. Washington has elected to make the US "the indispensable nation" of the global system. As a result, the gap between the US and the rest of the world continues to grow. At the end of the Cold War, the USA accounted for one third of global military spending; it now spends more than all other countries combined.

This formidable military superiority of the American hyperpower can be traced to the "militarism" inherent in the very concept of imperialism as defined by the English economist John A. Hobson at the turn of the last century. It has been magnified by the feudal-like hierarchical structure between the US overlord and its vassals that has been in place since the Second World War. Through this structure, a tutelary superpower took charge of most of the work of defending the capitalist system. It concretized the objective solidarity that exists between capitalist elites through an institutionalized subjective solidarity. The need for such solidarity had been demonstrated during the economic and political experience of the Great Depression, and became flagrant in the context of the global confrontation with the Stalinist system.

For this hierarchical structure to become a single global imperial system, and for it to remain so, it was and will always be absolutely essential for the superpower -- now a hyperpower -- to maintain the military wherewithal in keeping with its ambitions. Strengthening America's role as protective overlord was at the heart of the projects of the Reagan administration and its huge increase in military spending to record peacetime levels. This made the US a military hyperpower by developing the "asymmetric advantage" of its forces over those of the rest of the world.

The end of the Cold War, combined with the economic constraints of public finances dangerously in the red, had led to a reduction and then a leveling off of US military spending in the first half of the 1990s. But there was a resurgence of post-Soviet Russian challenges to US objectives around NATO expansion (from 1994 on) and the Balkan crisis (1994-1999), as well as the emergence of a challenge from post-Maoist China, illustrated by the confrontation over Taiwan in 1996. When combined with the backdrop of increased military cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, these developments led the Clinton administration to set in motion a long-term increase in military spending from 1998 onwards.

4. The renewed US race to overarm itself in relation to the rest of the world -- picking up where the Cold War arms race with the USSR left off -- was accompanied by a new approach in Washington towards the management of international relations.

Starting with the "Gulf crisis" in 1990, there was a passing infatuation of the US for the UN, accompanied by a belief that Washington could pursue its imperial objectives within an international legal framework attuned to its aspirations, as was the case for Iraq, Somalia and Haiti. These illusions were very short-lived and were initially jettisoned in order to carry out unilateral NATO action in the Balkans. At that time, Washington circumvented the Russian and Chinese vetoes at the UN Security Council by taking unilateral action through the US-led alliance, in the name of supposedly "humanitarian" concerns.

The new surge in military spending made possible by the September 11th attacks, the new consensus created by these attacks in relation to Washington's military expeditions --

combined with the "unilateralist" predisposition of George W. Bush and his team -- led the Bush administration to cast aside all institutional constraints to the pursuit of US military expansion. "Coalitions of the willing" under unchallenged US leadership even circumvented NATO, whose principle of unanimity granted the equivalent of veto rights to all member states.

The war of invasion in Iraq was a perfect opportunity to put this unilateralist approach into practice. The US point of view and interests were at odds not only with those of permanent members of the UN Security Council, such as Russia and China, who are generally opposed to US global hegemony, but also with traditional allies and NATO members, such as France and Germany. The overlap of interests and points of view between the governments of the US and the UK prompted them to carry out the invasion together, with the support of a few NATO members and a mix of docile and more zealous US allies.

The quagmire of the US-led coalition in Iraq and the Bush administration's difficulties running the occupation, have provided a striking demonstration of the futility of their arrogant unilateralism, which had been criticized from the start by a section of the US establishment, including within the Republican Party and the entourage of Bush senior.

5. The Iraq failure has highlighted the need for a return to a more subtle combination of military supremacy and the fashioning of a minimum consensus with the traditional allied powers (NATO, Japan), if not with all the world powers in the framework of the UN. Of course, consensus has a price. The US must skillfully take their partners' interests at least minimally into account while keeping the lion's share of the spoils for themselves.

Since the 1990-1991 turning point, Washington has felt that the UN's role as a testing ground and caretaker of the consensus between the big powers was obsolete. It sees the equality of rights (to veto) for the five permanent members of the Security Council as entirely outdated in a new unipolar world in which, in practice, only the USA can exercise a veto in the area of international "security." Paradoxically, though, the world order was overturned through a UN resolution that Bush senior obtained in order to secure domestic support for his war against Iraq. Then, under Clinton, the UN was reduced to post-war caretaking alongside NATO in the Balkans, in the territories invaded by NATO under US leadership. This same post-war caretaking formula was used once again in Afghanistan, following Washington's unilateral invasion.

Having led the invasion of Iraq, the USA now faces the difficulties of running the occupation and would like to find an Afghanistan-type solution. The letter and, even more so, the spirit of the UN Charter are blithely violated. According to the Charter, wars of invasion are illegal unless they have been decided by the Security Council. As such, Washington's wars are no longer even legal, let alone just or legitimate. The 1991 war had only been waged in the UN's name -- but not actually by the UN, as the UN general secretary himself put it at the time.

In any event, Washington only considers turning to the UN, or to NATO or any other multilateral body, when it determines that it will serve its purposes. The US has always reserved the right to act unilaterally in defense of its interests. International bodies are

perpetually confronted with the blackmail of US unilateralism. This has dramatically depreciated the UN Charter since the end of the Cold War.

6. The major post-Cold War policy directions of the US-led world imperialist order have ushered in a long historic period of unbridled military interventionism. The anti-war movement is the only force capable of overturning this state of affairs.

Since the collapse of the USSR, the evolution of the global relationship of military forces has virtually eliminated all impediments to imperialist interventionism. In the case of the nuclear deterrent, only a suicidal state would brandish atomic weapons against the US -- another matter being the case of a clandestine terrorist network not confined to any territory that could be targeted for reprisals. The main point is that no military force on earth can stop the steamroller of US hyperpower once it has decided to invade any given territory.

The only major power able to stop the imperial war machine is public opinion and its frontline detachments in the anti-war movement. Logically, the people of the United States play the decisive role in this regard. The "Vietnam syndrome" -- in other words, the impact of the spectacular anti-war movement that massively contributed to ending the US occupation of Vietnam -- militarily paralyzed the empire for more than 15 years, from the sudden withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 until the invasion of Panama in 1989.

Since the military action against the Panamanian dictatorship, Washington has been attacking enemies that are easy to demonize given their hideous dictatorial character: Noriega, Milosevic, Saddam Hussein, and so on. Moreover state and media propaganda blow things out of proportion whenever the need arises, i.e. if reality does not quite conform to the demonized image, especially in comparison with the West's allies. This was the case for Milosevic (compared to Tudjman, his Croatian rival), as it continues to be the case for the Iranian regime (compared to the far more obscurantist and medieval fundamentalism of the Saudi monarchy). Similar efforts are underway in relation to Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez.

Still, in 1990 Bush senior ran into some difficulty when he tried to obtain a green light from Congress for his military operation in the Gulf, in spite of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Similarly, the Clinton administration had problems getting support for intervention in the Balkans; and let us not forget its calamitous withdrawal from Somalia. This reflects strong and persistent reluctance within US public opinion and the impact of this uncertainty in the electoral arena. Unfortunately, this sentiment did not prevent the anti-war movement from promptly collapsing after its revival in 1990 in response to the Gulf crisis.

The September 11th 2001 attacks gave the Bush administration an illusion of mass, unconditional support within Western public opinion for its expansionist designs dressed up as the "war against terrorism." The illusion was short-lived. On February 15th 2003, 17 months after the terrorist attacks, the US and the world saw the broadest anti-war mobilization since Vietnam -- the broadest international mobilization ever in fact, around any cause. An expression of the massive opposition within global public opinion to the planned invasion of Iraq, this mobilization was nonetheless only a minority phenomenon in the USA itself. The international movement had, as usual, contributed powerfully to the strengthening of the US movement, but the effects of September 11th -- nurtured by a

campaign of disinformation orchestrated by the Bush administration -- were still too strong.

7. Setbacks for the US-led occupation in Iraq have created the conditions for a major shift in US public opinion and for a powerful and inexorable rise of sentiment in favor of bringing the troops home.

The problem this time around is that the frontline anti-war forces have seen a decline in activity since the invasion, although it should have continued to grow. This untimely retreat in the anti-war mobilization was caused by a number of factors. For one thing, the movement was quickly demoralized due to an outlook overly focused on the short term, although it was highly improbable that the movement would manage to prevent the invasion given the tremendous stakes involved for Washington. For another, there is widespread belief in the US in the possibility of settling the question through the ballot box, whereas only mass pressure would force a withdrawal of US troops, given the bipartisan consensus around the importance of keeping a hold on Iraq. Finally, there is an illusion that the various armed actions against the occupation troops will be enough to end the occupation.

These views are at odds with the Vietnamese experience, too far removed from the awareness of new generations for the lessons to have remained in collective memory. There has not been the kind of continuity in the anti-war movement that could ensure such lessons are passed from one generation to the next. The movement that put an end to the US occupation of Vietnam was built over time, as a long-term movement, and not as a mobilization immediately preceding the outbreak of war and then demobilized once the invasion began. The movement had far fewer electoral illusions in the USA given that it had been built under the Johnson Democratic administration and then peaked under the Nixon Republican administration. It was clear to the movement that, in spite of their impressive resistance, incomparably broader and more effective than Iraq's, the Vietnamese were tragically isolated militarily and could not inflict a Dien Bien Phu on US troops -- that is to say, a defeat comparable to the one that had ended the French occupation of their country in 1954.

This is even more evident in the case of Iraq. Leaving aside the heterogeneous character of the origin and form of violent actions -- where terrorist attacks of a sometimes communalist character against the civilian population are combined with legitimate actions against the occupation forces and their local subordinates -- the nature of the terrain itself makes it impossible to inflict a military defeat on the US hyperpower. This is why the occupiers are far more fearful of mass mobilizations of the Iraqi population, such as those that forced the decision to hold elections by universal suffrage by January 2005 at the latest.

Only a big upsurge of the anti-war movement, relayed by anti-war public opinion in the USA and around the world and combined with pressure from the Iraqi people, can force Washington to release its grip on a country whose economic and strategic importance is far greater than Vietnam's, and which has already cost so many billions of dollars to invade and occupy.

Iraq is only a potential "new Vietnam" from a political angle, not a military one. It is certainly the biggest quagmire for the US since 1973 -- a quagmire whose repercussions

are amplified by memories of Vietnam (proof of the persistence of the "syndrome") and by the development of global media and communications since that time.

We have an historic opportunity to resume the momentum of February 15th 2003 and rebuild a long-term anti-war movement. This movement could transform the US-led Iraq adventure into a new Vietnam, in the political sense: a new long-term paralysis of the imperial war machine. Combined with the rise of the global mobilization against neoliberalism, this would open up the way for the profound social and political changes urgently needed in this world of spiraling injustice.

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*This text, written for the general assembly of the French anti-war organisation "Agir contre la guerre" (Act against the war), was translated by Raghu Krishnan for the Canadian magazine **New Socialist** and reprinted with permission of the author.*

Gilbert Achcar's latest books in English are [*The Clash of Barbarisms: Sept. 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*](#) and [*Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror*](#), both from Monthly Review Press, New York.



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War as a “Masculine” Institution *Dianne Feeley*

Today war means massive civilian dislocation, starvation, the trafficking of women and children, fields sown with land mines and contaminated with depleted uranium. Whether “smart” bombs kill civilians dropped from on high or whether they are humiliated, raped and murdered by soldiers or paramilitaries, war fuels acts of violence. These acts of aggression are particularly harmful to women and children—yet war is often justified as “to protect the women and children.”

Women do have the right to defend themselves against invasion and occupation, including through armed struggle. Today's global reality, however, is a panoply of aggressive wars and domination in which the United States plays the dominant role—although countries such as Russia and Israel are also brutal occupying powers.

Over the last couple of years all around the United States small organizing committees of Women in Black have sprung up. These local networks of women oppose the use of violence and terror against civilians and call for a peace with justice. They wear black in the spirit of Women in Black of Israel and Palestine, who call for the restoration of human rights of the Palestinian people, and of the Argentine mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who gathered to demand that the military regime be held accountable for the “disappearance” of their children.

Playing off Washington's terrorist alert, “Code Red,” other women have claimed pink as their color. “Code Pink” is a group of women who wear bright pink to symbolize their preemptive strike for peace, a determination to maintain civil liberties as well as a celebration of life, not war. They have vigiled in front of the White House and confronted various pro-war spokeswomen.

These various vigils and marches in opposition to state-sponsored violence are a visual expression of the solidarity that binds women globally. Women have mobilized not because we are genetically or physically any less capable than men of inflicting pain, but because in this gendered world, where physical aggressiveness is regarded as a positive quality in men but not women, women have been less burdened with the propaganda that justifies aggression.

Many Faces of War

War in the form of occupation is being waged on the Iraqis, Chechens and Palestinians. Checkpoints, military raids and curfews are the daily reality, trapping people in their homes, preventing them from going to school or work and reducing their ability to carry out daily errands. Look at the photos of Jenin, Nablus or Grozny and see how armies have reduced cities and towns to rubble.

War as civil war and ethnic conflict is being waged in Colombia, the Sudan, in the Congo and has been unleashed in the Ivory Coast. Only too recently it burned hot in Kosova and Bosnia. As in the case of occupation, the “other” is to be captured, subjugated, humiliated, raped, tortured, forced to flee or exterminated.

War as martial law is in effect in Aceh, where the conflict between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) has continued for more than a quarter century. Increases in the number of extra judicial executions, “disappearances,” arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, forced displacement and destruction of property has increased since the reimposition of martial law last year. Indonesia’s National Commission on Human Rights holds Indonesia’s security forces responsible for most of the attacks on unarmed civilians, yet no military officers have been convicted.

War in the guise of “liberation from the Taliban” has been imposed in Afghanistan since September 2001. A society that has been torn apart by foreign intervention (United States, USSR and Pakistan) and civil war is being propped up by the presence of U.S. and UN soldiers. How long is the population supposed to live in shells of bombed-out homes, without work? How long will war lords rule?

War in the form of U.S./UN sanctions was waged for over a decade in Iraq, destroying the country’s infrastructure and dramatically escalating infant mortality. There were hospitals and doctors, but no medicine. It is a country with enormous oil resources, but a stagnating and deteriorating infrastructure.

These wars have been justified as necessary in the name of democracy or liberation--or even, in the case of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, in the name of women’s rights. Yet on closer inspection we hear the echo of a U.S. general’s infamous statement during the Vietnam war: “We had to destroy the village in order to save it.”

War, militarism and occupation undercuts the ability of women to have the right to control their lives:

1. War--and its aftermath--kills the civilian population.

Despite the hype of “surgical” operations, war kills the civilian population, the majority of whom are women and children. The “smart” bombs of the 1991 Gulf War killed people in the Amerriyah air raid shelter in Baghdad and during the Afghanistan war U.S. planes bombed a Red Cross building, a wedding, a UN building. Since U.S. forces have occupied Iraq, over 10,000 Iraqis, overwhelmingly civilians have been killed. During the siege of Fallujah alone more than 700 civilians died. In May 2004 the U.S. military reported a successful bombing raid on a terrorist camp, but the evidence is clear that they bombed a wedding party.

During the 1991 war against Iraq an estimated 100,000-150,000 Iraqis--mostly civilians--and 184 U.S. soldiers were killed. The bombing destroyed Iraq’s water and sewage treatment plants, its electrical production plants and pharmaceutical supply facilities.

But in the decade after the war, with UN-imposed sanctions, at least 500,000 Iraqi children died. UNICEF reported that every month during that decade of sanctions over 5,000 Iraqi children under the age of five perished from causes related to the sanctions. That is, more Iraqi children died each month than the total number of people killed on 9/11!

War continues after the bombing through the laying of land mines and uranium poisoning caused by the use of depleted uranium ore in warheads (used to maximize the effectiveness and strength for precision bombing). High concentrations of uranium have been found in the Afghani, the Balkan and Iraqi populations. (Several thousand U.S. soldiers who fought in the Gulf War have also died from cancers and other medical complications related to the war.)

Kabul, a city of 3.5 million people, suffered the highest number of fixed targets during the 2001-02 “Operation Enduring Freedom.” Preliminary samples taken in the city of newborn infants reveal 25% are suffering from congenital and post-natal health problems. These are most likely associated with

uranium contamination. Such infants are lethargic, develop skin rashes, have large heads in comparison to body size and undeveloped muscles.

The proliferation of arms means that social tensions that have existed within various countries—whether based on ethnicity, religion or different modes of living—are more likely to explode into civil conflicts. This world arms market—almost half of which is controlled by the United States—results in death and destruction, the poisoning of land and sea, and causes miscarriages, birth defects, cancers and other long-term health problems.

*We will never know the exact body count of the Israeli attack on Jenin refugee camp, in the West Bank, last April. First-hand reports indicate hundreds dead, bodies lying in the street—some shot at close range—buildings reduced to rubble with people trapped inside. Hundreds of men were rounded up and taken away to unknown interrogation and detention camps. While women were left trying to find out whether their husbands, fathers or sons were alive or dead, they also had to shoulder the task of finding food and shelter for their families. UN Special Representative Terje Roed-Larsen, after touring the camp, reported “colossal destruction . . . horrifying beyond belief.”

The Israeli army blocked entry by humanitarian aid convoys, journalists, and human rights investigators; subsequently the Sharon government with U.S. support successfully blocked a UN investigation.

Yet Israel’s military might was unleashed once again in Rafah, a Palestinian refugee camp in the Gaza strip. The Israeli army established its power by massive bombing that resulted in civilian death as well as the destruction of hundreds of housing units. The destruction is carried out in the name of Israel’s “security.”

2. War increases violence against women.

In times of war, rape is a method of terrorizing the civilian population. Whether the rape occurs in an isolated setting or takes place in front of the woman's family, its purpose is to demonstrate the complete domination of the warring party over the woman and her people. She is the symbol of her society—her humiliation is to demonstrate how completely and contemptuously her society has been defeated.

Gang rape, sexual mutilation and the deliberate attempt to impregnate a woman and confine her so that she must bear the unwanted child are all practices militarism imposes on a subject people.

During the war in Bosnia a decade ago rape was used as a weapon of political terror. An estimated 20,000-30,000 Muslim and Croatian women and children were raped, often cruelly and repeatedly. Many rape survivors—held by regular or irregular soldiers until their pregnancy was beyond the second month—were forced to bear unwanted children as a form of “ethnic cleansing.”

Rape and massacres also prepare the population for wars to come. In March 2002 Hindu fascists killed over 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat, India in what was a state-sponsored program. Muslim women were stripped, gang raped and then burnt alive. And that was to be the preview of things to come. With more than 150,000 Muslims forced to flee their homes and businesses, the right-wing Hindu movement claimed the right to demolish mosques, rewrite schoolbooks and murder those who stand in their way.

Soldiers bring the war home. The rape of girls by U.S. servicemen on Okinawa and the murder of three women at Fort Bragg, NC shortly after their husbands—“special operations officers”—returned from duty in Afghanistan illustrate how war is waged both abroad and “at home.” Soldiers are trained to be killers—to judge in an instant and automatically pull the trigger. Aggression is not something easily turned on and off; it is more likely to become part of a culture of domination that is reproduced again and again. Veterans returning from war are expected to cease violent behavior. But many are unable to

“adjust.” The pattern of their lives is far more likely to include incidents of domestic violence, alcoholism or drug addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, difficulty in maintaining a good job and unable to sustain relationships.

3. War restricts women's freedom of movement in daily life.

Restrictions enforced by the military have a devastating effect on women, reducing their access to food, resources, work and the larger social interaction that comes from going to work or to the market. They see their children becoming malnourished, unable to live a normal life or even attend school. They do not have access to medical care.

* The situation of Palestinian women has been well documented by human rights and UN agencies—in the first two years of the *intifada* alone 22 women and 16 children died while stopped at Israeli checkpoints.

Since September 2000 the number of women unable to receive prenatal care has increased five fold. Fifty-five women in labor were unable to get to a hospital and were forced to give birth at a checkpoint. Twenty had stillbirths or lost their babies. These checkpoints are yet another source of dehumanizing the Palestinian population.

* An Iraqi women's rights organization documented that in the five months following the U.S. occupation of Iraq more than 400 women were kidnapped, raped or sold. Faced with these alarming cases of sexual violence, many women and their daughters are confining themselves to their homes, or only dare to go out in the street accompanied by their male relatives.

Amnesty International pointed out that in this climate of instability some of the country's religious conservatives have pressed for restrictions on women's freedom of movement. With less than fifteen minutes of discussion the U.S.-backed Iraqi Governing Council passed Resolution 137, canceling legislation designed to protect women and placing them instead under the jurisdiction of religious law. Although Paul Bremer did not allow the resolution to go into effect, the threat to women's rights illustrates how the U.S. occupation prefers to deal with reactionary clerics than with a civil society in which women's organizations and trade unions are organizing in the interests of the majority. While religious conservatives vigorously oppose the U.S. occupation and maintain an social infrastructure to feed, cloth and educate the population they will gain a hearing. This power will be used to impede women.

4. War forces the civilian population to flee from their homes.

* During the twenty-five months of Israeli incursions in Palestinian territory, over 9,750 homes were demolished in the West Bank and another 2,349 in the densely populated Gaza strip. Although collective punishment is a violation of international law, Israel has destroyed more than a thousand Palestinian homes following military or municipal decision.

Palestinian villages near Israeli settlements have faced constantly escalating attacks from armed settlers. Over the last four years settler harassment, military house-razing policies, the building of the wall the World Court has ruled illegal, confiscation of traditional Palestinian lands in the name of security, as well as military occupation and unemployment has forced 150,000 Palestinians into exile.

* Since 1999--when Sudan became an exporter of oil--the ongoing civil war in the South has taken on a new level of brutality. With oil revenues the government has been able to obtain more lethal weaponry, displacing the civilian population in areas where oil is extracted and where further oil exploration is being carried out. While diplomacy seems to have had an impact on drawing the civil war in the South to a close, the situation in Darfur, in Western Sudan, has exploded into a brutal war. The destruction of villages, the rape of women and civilian displacement is the hallmark its hallmark.

Since the start of the civil war twenty years ago, 5.5 million Sudanese have been forced to flee their homes, with one million currently living in exile. An additional two million died from the war in the South or from the famine that follows war.

* In the current phase of Colombia's civil war more than two million Colombians--particularly the Afro-Caribbean population--have been displaced, forced to move from their rural homes to cities and towns within the country, or abroad.

Most have been displaced by the paramilitaries. Yet under the banner of fighting terrorism and the narcotics trade, the Bush administration is pouring \$470 million a year into "training" Colombian troops (who have close links to the paramilitaries) and police.

* More than 160,000 Chechen civilians have been displaced by the Russian troops, with at least 20,000 living in tent camps in Ingushetia where conditions are primitive but safe. Although it was winter, in December 2003 the Russian authorities closed one of the six camps in Ingushetia, cutting off its gas and electricity.

Pressuring the displaced population to "voluntarily" return to Chechnya, the Federal Migration Service uses both the carrot (promising non-existent, or already occupied or uninhabitable accommodations) and the stick (threats to close the other camps).

Meanwhile in Chechnya human rights organizations continue to document extra judicial executions, forced disappearances and torture of noncombatants by Russian troops as well as assassinations, mainly of Chechens collaborating with the Russians.

During bombing campaigns or invasions, civilians able to escape the war area do so, and usually with just the clothes on their backs. With men often off at war or forced into hiding, the task of resettling falls to a great extent on women.

The need to replace community networks that have been destroyed places an enormous burden on women, struggling to overcome acute trauma even while finding a way to house, feed and protect all of their children.

Whether the civilian population ends up in camps within the country, flees over a border to refugee camps or are ultimately able to migrate to Europe, Australia or North America depends on many factors: their level of education, whether other family members are already settled in other countries, their host country's willingness to accept them.

In 2001 there were an estimated 14.9 million refugees and at least 22 million internally displaced persons. More than two-thirds were from Afghanistan, Angola, Burma, Burundi, Congo-Kinshasa, Eritrea, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Somalia and Sudan.

War reinforces global poverty and racism, disrupting and destroying the infrastructure of the Third World, including schools, scarce medical facilities, and water supplies. Yet countries built on immigration--Australia, Canada and the United States--place severe limits on the number of refugees they are willing to accept.

The UN High Commission for Refugee statistics for 2001 reveals that of the top ten countries receiving refugees, not one is in the advanced capitalist world!

5. War continues for refugees who are not welcomed once they reach "safety."

Women refugees have often fled their homes because of sexual violence only to find themselves once more in a potentially violent situation. Any time an army is sent to "keep the peace," the trafficking of women--usually involving coercion--develops or is intensified.

Dependent on others for help, refugee women often find that male officials in the camps demand sexual favors in return for food and shelter. Last year incidents of sexual abuse by humanitarian aid workers surfaced in refugee camps in Zimbabwe and West Africa.

Women have also been molested, raped and even sold into prostitution by smugglers, including the police. It is estimated that the trafficking of humans is a \$7 billion-a-year business. In Asia and the Pacific region alone more than 30 million children have been traded over the last three decades. The victims are usually teenager girls who end up working in brothels or sweatshops. The sexual trafficking of women and children is directly related to the wars and civil wars taking place in their countries.

According to Amnesty International, women seeking asylum in the United States have been also detained without adequate food or medical care, forced to undergo strip searches and treated in demeaning and humiliating ways, including sexual assault.

In a world where there is free movement of capital, the movement of people is more and more constrained. Last year we saw the refusal of the Australian government to allow Afghan refugees--in desperate condition--the right to land on their territory.

The governments of the European Union are developing common and draconian border policies; the United States has expanded its border patrol, building a fence along the southern California border and demanding that Canada adopt strict policies.

Despite the fact that the legal right to asylum has been ratified by 140 countries, today refugees are subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, denial of social and economic rights, closed borders and forcible return to their country of origin.

Women refugees have often fled their country as victims of sexual assault, or have particular gender reasons for seeking asylum. Yet gender-based claims for asylum were rejected until the early 1990s. Gender-based assaults were treated as "private" not public matters.

Canada became the first country to recognize gender-specific forms of persecution. Since that time women refugees have successfully sought asylum for sexual violence in situations of conflict as well as for protection against "honor" crimes and female genital mutilation. Yet states have not accepted the right of women to asylum for situations of domestic violence, no matter how brutal.

In the United States, since 85% of immigrants are people of color--and like all new immigrants have a higher fertility rate--anti-immigrant propagandists paint a picture of immigrants looking for a "free ride" and who will overwhelm the country's economy.

As a result, passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996 particularly targets immigrants. Almost half of the expected welfare "reform" savings came from cuts to immigrants' benefits, including cutting non-citizens from the food stamp program.

6. War dehumanizes the aggressors as well as the victims.

The military is an institution designed to destroy "targets" from afar or "control" a population up close, as in an occupation. Thus the military institution builds an efficient, hierarchical and aggressive model. This does not depend on the particular gender of the soldier but on the "masculine" gender of the institution. In that sense all soldiers are male, all civilians are female.

This efficient machine gives permission to soldiers to see themselves as all-powerful. The occupying power needs to "control" the population through offering "carrots" (incentives) or "sticks" (repression), but finds repression a more readily available tool. "The enemy" must be broken down so they understand and accept their powerlessness. Thus whether in Iraq, the West Bank and Gaza, Aceh, the Congo, or Chechnya the occupying army justifies its repressive actions by seeing the population as

less than human and therefore can be mistreated. Soldiers must either learn to relish humiliating the enemy or run the risk of being paralyzed by guilt. Once one perceives the enemy as “vermin,” “terrorists” or some other sub-human animals who need to be brutalized, boasting about it is a way of burying one’s moral sense. (“Why are they smiling?” G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Christian Science Monitor*, 5/26/04) Accounts of Israeli “refusenicks” mention how their fellow soldiers described Palestinians in racist and humiliating terms, took pleasure in tormenting the civilian population in a variety of ways and boasted of the number they managed to kill. A similar dynamic is apparent in the photos soldiers took at Abu Ghraib prison, as Susan Sontag describes:

“You ask yourself how someone can grin at the sufferings and humiliation of another human being—drag a naked Iraqi man along the floor with a leash? set guard dogs at the genitals and legs of cowering, naked prisoners? rape and sodomize prisoners/ force shackled hooded prisoners to masturbate or commit sexual acts with each other? beat prisoners to death?—and feel naïve in asking the questions, since the answer is, self-evidently: people do these things to other people. Not just in Nazi concentration camps and in Abu Ghraib when Saddam Hussein ran it. Americans, too, do when they have permission. When they are told or made to feel that those over whom they have absolute power deserve to be mistreated, humiliated, tormented. They do them when they are led to believe that the people they are torturing belong to an inferior, despicable race or religion. For the meaning of these pictures is not just that these acts were performed, but that their perpetrators had no sense that there was anything wrong in what the pictures show. Even more appalling, since the pictures were meant to be circulated and seen by many people, it was all fun. And this idea of fun is, alas, more and more—contrary to what Mr. Bush is telling the world—part of ‘the true nature and heart of America.’” (*NYTimes Magazine*, 5/24/04)

For those who naively thought that somehow the institution of the military would become more compassionate with the addition of women in combat roles misunderstood the way systems of hierarchy and repression are reproduced. We speak of institutional racism and institutional sexism because it is not the good will of individuals but the reproduction of institutional values that dominates. Some journalists have been shocked to discover photos that show even women soldiers in Abu Ghraib prison were involved in humiliating and torturing prisoners. In fact women soldiers must “prove” they are men. The photos at Abu Ghraib reveal that these women soldiers are fully integrated into military culture—they too can smile with the glee of torturers.

Yet trophy postcards taken of lynchings in the U.S. South less than a century ago reveal the presence of white women as smiling participants. Today the “security” of America justifies all, then it was the “security” of the white “race.” But if institutions mold the individual to “accept” what is immoral, there are always those individuals who do not go along. In the case of Abu Ghraib, soldier Joseph Darby not only refused to participate in the torture, but also reported the practice even though he risked being labeled a “traitor.”

7. War also unleashes violence *within* the military.

More than 60,000 U.S. women soldiers have been stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan, serving in more combat-support roles than ever before, including flying fighter jets, conducting patrols and analyzing intelligence data. The problem of sexual assault of women soldiers by fellow soldiers publicly surfaced with an article in the *Denver Post*, the result of a nine-month investigation (www.denverpost.com) By February 2004 Pentagon officials announced that at least 88 cases of sexual misconduct have been reported by troops in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan. (see “Camouflaging Criminals: Sexual Violence in the Military,” Amy Herdy and Miles Moffeit, *Amnesty Now*, Spring 2004)

Sexual harassment and rape is—and has been—a major issue within the U.S. military. In 1991 witnesses told Congress that between 60,000-200,000 women servicemen had sexually assaulted veterans over time. According to the *Congressional Record*, nearly 30% of 202 female Vietnam veterans surveyed in 1990 reported a sexual encounter “accompanied by force or threat of force.” Two

Department of Veterans Affairs surveys indicated that between 21-30% of the women reported rape or attempted rape (although its 1995 survey put the percentage of women sexually assaulted in single digits).

Yet as early as 1988 a Pentagon survey found that more than 90% of those victimized by military sexual harassment did not report their incidents. And The Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence noted in their March 2003 report that “victims wish they had never disclosed their abuse because the disclosure damaged their military careers.”

The reality is that those who rape within the military are rarely punished. After the 1991 Navy Tailhook Association convention in Las Vegas, where more than 100 officers sexually assaulted and harassed dozens of women, no one was convicted. In 1997, after a sexual assault at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, an investigative panel shelved findings linking sexual harassment to military culture. Such a finding directly indicts the institution of the military.

8. War and the militaristic culture it imposes prioritizes weaponry over human services.

No society can afford to fund war *and* social programs. The United States military budget is not only the highest of any country in the world but surpasses the combined spending of the next eight countries--Russia, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, Saudi Arabia and Italy.

President Bush proposed a 2003 budget that would raise “defense” spending by nearly 13%. This is the greatest increase since the Cold War era and is justified in the administration's National Security Strategy paper as maintaining forces “strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries” from the dream of ever “surpassing or equaling, the power of the United States.”

The military budget eats up one-third of the federal budget. Yet faced with persistent unemployment and a sluggish economy, the Bush administration blithely states “we” can afford the coming war and calls for yet another round of tax cuts for the rich. But an inflated military budget is not just a Republican idea. It is a bipartisan one.

As more troops and military hardware pour into the Middle East here at home almost every state budget is projecting draconian budget cuts that will affect libraries, schools, recreation programs, medical care--all the programs that effect the quality of our lives.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 33 million people live below poverty (many of them the working poor). The poverty rate in 2001 stood at 11.6%, with the percentage of Black and Latino poverty double that rate.

Roe v. Wade, the limited victory of U.S. women's reproductive rights, has survived more than thirty years. Yet despite the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, most counties across the United States have never established abortion services.

Since the Carter administration the cultural battle against women's rights continues to chip away access to abortion. But the whole range of reproductive rights issues--ranging from addressing sterilization abuse, improving pregnancy programs, campaigning to lower infant mortality rates or aiding women after the birth of their children through the establishment of federally funded, quality day care--are not issues any administration prioritizes.

Through executive orders, legal briefs and delegations at various international conferences, the Bush administration has revealed its particular anti-women positions. While scientifically accurate information about contraception and abortion has disappeared from federal government web sites, federally funded

sex education programs preach abstinence as the only solution to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

At last year's United Nations Special Session on Children the Bush administration delegates opposed efforts to help young girls who are victims of rape under wartime conditions and request abortion. The administration has frozen millions of dollars of funding for programs run by the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization to advance reproductive health and combat HIV and AIDS.

While Bush's 2003 "State of the Union" address trumpeted funding for AIDS treatment in Africa, at a United Nations-sponsored conference in Bangkok last fall the Bush delegates attempted to block endorsement of condom use to prevent AIDS. President Bush has also withdrawn his support for Senate ratification of a treaty that requires nations to remove barriers of discrimination against women in areas like legal rights and health care.

At the beginning of the 21st century a campaign against war, racism and poverty is central to the well being of women, children and all human beings. We need a campaign to oppose the various trade policies that privatize water, electricity, social security and even education. We need a campaign that opposes war, which drains funds from all our social, educational, environmental and medical needs. The Pentagon spends more than \$842 billion a year, or half of the world's total military spending. The cost of one Trident submarine (\$1.5 billion) could immunize the children of the world against six deadly diseases, preventing one million deaths annually.

No matter what the social problem, the U.S. government cannot "afford" to spend significant resources on it because currently more than 50% of the federal discretionary budget is slated for the military.

We need a campaign that rejects the reactionary call to build fortresses of wealth, which widen the gap between those who have immense resources and those who have too few. We need a campaign that sees through the phoniness of "humanitarian intervention" and calls for solidarity in the face of war and globalized capital. We also need to build a world in which human beings are not imprisoned by gendered roles.

I would like to acknowledge the I received from the following sources: Betsy Hartmann's "Militarism and Reproductive Freedom," a 1/4/03 Znet Commentary, Women of Color Resource Center's "10 Reasons Why Women Should Oppose the 'War on Terrorism,'" War Times (June 2003), Susan Sontag's article from the 5/24/04 NYTimes Magazine, and reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.



Graphic courtesy of ERK and FRSO.

Imperialism and Occupation after "Iraqi Sovereignty"

David Finkel

BEFORE THE INVASION of Iraq, we identified three basic impulses behind this imperialist war: to consolidate unchallenged U.S. control of Middle East oil supplies and therefore world oil prices; to serve as cover for the far-right domestic agenda of this administration; to "reorganize the Middle East" on the basis of total U.S.-Israeli supremacy. We argued (and this was not uniquely our own view) that the unusually reckless course pursued by this administration reflected a combination of traditional imperial greed and an ideologically driven "neoconservative" assumption that the United States should unilaterally rule the world.

The thirteen months since George W. Bush proclaimed "the end of major combat operations in Iraq" have not been lucky ones for Washington. The balance sheet of this war of imperial domination is generally negative. To briefly sum up the results of the three strategic objectives:

- 1) The stability of oil supply and price is actually more uncertain than before the war--partially because the entirely predictable rise in terrorism has impacted Saudi Arabia, threatening to panic the large foreign community that staffs the oil production infrastructure of that country.
- 2) The administration has pursued its domestic agenda with some success, but faces declining public support and in particular growing defections from elites who are horrified by the middle-and-long-run implications of its monstrous fiscal irresponsibility.
- 3) The Middle East--broadly speaking, the entire Muslim world from Pakistan to North Africa--is closer to chaos than to "democratic reorganization." The specific situation in Iraq will be discussed in more detail below, but a few general observations are in order:

a) Afghanistan is a barely disguised disaster, with a government that basically controls the capital city, with warlords and drug lords carving up the countryside, and with a Taliban insurgency that cannot regain power but largely negates "reconstruction" programs.

b) Hatred of United States policies is bitter and widespread across the Muslim world, expressed partly in rising terrorist recruitment but even more so in bitter popular alienation.

c) In the case of Palestine/Israel especially, the neoconservative scenario was that "regime change" in Iraq would set off a domino effect which--combined with the application of Israeli military power--would bring about Palestinian surrender to U.S.-dictated terms of settlement.

Since the intended sweeping regional shift to a U.S.-dictated agenda has proven illusory, the Bush-Sharon policy has become one of total reliance on extreme and almost unrestrained Israeli brutality, on a scale that often exceeds that of South African apartheid--assassination of Palestinian leadership without concern for accompanying civilian carnage; destruction of population centers from Jenin (2002) to Rafah (2004); deliberate killing of children on a substantial scale; systematic infliction of economic ruin and explicit U.S. support for Israeli land grabs.

The fact that the U.S. administration has packaged these atrocities as "laying the basis for a Palestinian state" has brought the real prospects for a two-state solution to the brink of final collapse (we leave aside here the more complex fact that "two states" represents at best only a partial solution in the first place).

4) Before a closer examination of Iraq, a couple of conclusions can be drawn from the above. It is now evident to everyone that Iraq was envisioned as only one in a chain of rapid conquests in the post-9/11 world: Afghanistan as the appetizer, Iran as the soup, Iran as the main course and Syria for dessert.

This ideologically driven delusion was a big part of why Afghanistan and then Iraq were invaded with vastly fewer resources, military and otherwise, than were needed for the enormous tasks of "reconstruction and reorganization" (as opposed to the relatively simple job of overwhelming weak armies with massive U.S. technological superiority).

The U.S. population, immediately after 9/11, might have accepted the costs of invading Afghanistan with, say, the kind of military operation (over 100,000 troops) used on Iraq. But it would not have accepted the burden associated invading Iraq with the numbers of troops used in Vietnam--which is roughly what knowledgeable military officers predicted would be necessary for a successful occupation.

That is partly why this occupation became a chaotic debacle. That debacle in turn explains why the massive, systematic lies with which this war had to be sold to the

U.S. public have now been revealed. That is also why we should expect, and hope, that from now on the former "Vietnam Syndrome" will be renewed by an "Iraq Syndrome" when future imperialist adventures are proposed. As antiwar activists we must do everything we can to ensure this result, which will be one of the very few positive consequences of this enormously evil war.

Can the United States Withdraw?

After the delusional promises of "reorganizing the Middle East" have collapsed, the question facing U.S. imperialism in Iraq now is whether it has a way out. The stakes are very high indeed: If the United States is required to maintain a military force in Iraq at present or higher levels, and if (as John Kerry advocates) the size of the standing U.S. Army is to be expanded by 40,000, then the prospect is not only for a sustained antiwar movement but also--very likely--an explosive debate on the reintroduction of the draft.

In such a struggle, the Republican right wing will motivate conscription on the basis of the permanent "war on terror," while Democratic liberals will promote "national service" and the drivel of "shared sacrifice." For the U.S. ruling class, however, a fight over conscription, with the raw politics of class and race it would entail, is a nightmare scenario.

The choices for U.S. imperialism in Iraq are framed by the following context:

(1) Unlike the situation in Vietnam in the 1970s, "just getting out" is not an option. (It is of course our option as revolutionary socialists and antiwar activists. That's a different matter.) Withdrawing from Vietnam and accepting a Communist victory was not the first choice for the U.S. ruling class, but it did not constitute a fundamental threat, especially as China was in rapid transition toward allying itself with the United States against the USSR.

Today, in contrast, to leave Iraq without a stable regime in place risks the country's disintegration, potential chaos in Saudi Arabia and a repeat of the 1973 and 1979 oil price shocks, to say nothing of the implications for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iraq is materially strategic whereas Indochina was more of a pawn, even if a large one, in the Cold War great game.

(2) The U.S. military at its present size cannot maintain a long occupation of Iraq on its own, due to the extreme stresses on the reserves and National Guard and the demoralization created by "stop loss" orders which keep soldiers in the military after their enlistment terms expire.

Roughly speaking, then, the options for the Bush administration after June 30 look like this: To restrict the size and scope of U.S. military operations and require Iraqi security forces to do most of the policing of the country; to rely on a new influx of

international forces under UN or NATO auspices; to expand the American role and force levels for offensive operations against insurgent forces.

The third of these options is so risky in terms of U.S. domestic politics and military morale that it seems unlikely. The second option is vastly preferable, but seems out of the question since the war and occupation are so universally internationally unpopular. (A new Kerry administration might have more luck than the despised Bush regime in internationalizing an imperialist occupation of Iraq.)

Our guess then is that the first option, "Iraqification" will be attempted, risky as it is. The hope would be to reduce the U.S. troop presence from 138,000 back down to a more sustainable 100-110,000. This requires a substantial reconstitution of the old Iraqi army, along with much of its leadership structure, the peremptory dissolution of which was probably Paul Bremer's biggest blunder.

The four months leading up to the U.S. election are critical. By that time we will have a pretty clear idea whether the Bush administration has been able to pull off a messy, but partly viable exit strategy, or whether an escalating Iraq occupation crisis will be left to a second Bush term or an incoming Kerry administration.

Iraq's Future

The rapid U.S. military conquest of Iraq and collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime created, quite predictably, an imperialist occupation superimposed on an incipient Iraqi civil war resulting from decades of brutal dictatorship. That civil war has numerous dimensions--religious, tribal, ethnic and political, as well as a component of reviving class struggle.

The complexity of the Iraqi situation arises from the fact that the manifold expressions of anti-occupation resistance are, at the same time, bids of rival factions for political supremacy in Iraq. The same is true of efforts of various figures like Ayatollah al-Sistani to cooperate with the occupation or to become mediators.

It is simply not the case that there is an "Iraqi national resistance camp" on one side, confronting a "puppet collaborator camp" on the other. That kind of crude model and the associated terminology should be generally avoided in our analysis.

The "resistance" includes, for example, attempts at building new trade unions of Iraqi workers and the unemployed--exactly what revolutionary socialists would advocate as central activity. It also includes forces who put car bombs in the middle of the largest Shia religious festivals--exactly as fascists anywhere would operate. To regard these as part of a common national resistance is nonsense.

To be sure, there are some authentic "puppet collaborator" elements whose fate is instructive. Among these are the Iraqi National Congress, headed by Ahmad Chalabi, which may once have represented a democratic anti-Saddam

resistance--given the smoke and mirrors world Chalabi constructed it is ultimately hard to say—which became the favored faction of the neocon civilians in the Pentagon as the source of (i) ostensible intelligence on Iraqi WMDs and (ii) promises of massive popular Iraqi support for an American "liberation."

U.S. intelligence and military professionals apparently never trusted Chalabi further than they could throw him, but in the factional wars inside the U.S. government and media the neocons as well as at least one prominent writer from the left (Christopher Hitchens) supported him completely. So did the single most unreliable establishment reporter on this entire crisis, Judith Miller of The New York Times, whose entire body of work has been apologetically repudiated by the editors (without naming her).

Who used whom in the Chalabi-Pentagon relationship remains obscure, but he has now been famously dumped and accused of espionage for Iran--under circumstances that would suggest either a harebrained frameup by U.S. authorities, or the dumbest spying ever by Chalabi. Be all this as it may, the absurd plan to install Chalabi and the INC at the head of a "liberal Iraqi democracy" (meaning pro-U.S., pro-Israeli and devoted to the free market) has blown apart, and the frenzied improvisations of recent months would seem to suggest that there never was a serious backup plan.

What then is the character of the "Iraqi interim government" that has been installed, almost a month early as the former "Iraqi Governing Council" disintegrated? Two simple facts are clear from the outset:

1) Iraq remains a country under imperialist occupation, and will continue to be so after the charade of "transfer of sovereignty" on June 30 under the cover of a UN Security Council resolution. It will be under occupation until the U.S. military is kicked out, and until real power resides in an Iraqi government and not the imperial headquarters euphemistically called "the United States embassy."

2) The interim government, more than just a puppet regime, is a prototype for some kind of bourgeois coalition government, cemented of course in the first instance by the military occupying power, but also by attempts at regional balance and Islam as a unifying thread.

This new government, if it is to have enough legitimacy to be of any use, must be seen to exercise more independence from the dictates of the occupier than the former IGC. This cannot be entirely sham. At the very least, the interim government cannot afford to openly hand over control of Iraq's oil to American interests or massively privatize the country's national industries (the effect of which would be to create the Russian model of entrepreneurship with Mexican standards of good government). It will seek to carve out some independent space for maneuver vis-a-vis the U.S. occupation, and will probably have some tactical support in this regard from France and other UNSC powers who have their own strategic and economic interests in Iraq.

3) Aside from some kind of economic plan and partially containing armed insurgents (who cannot in any case be defeated by a government whose legitimacy is negated by the very presence of the occupying power that protects it), probably the thorniest problem for the interim or any future Iraqi government is preventing a Kurdish secession. Imperialism also has a strong stake in this, since a war over the Kurdistan oil fields would be a potentially disastrous development for world price stability.

This is a problem bequeathed to the Iraqi people by imperialism. Simply put, the Kurds--who more than other sectors of Iraqi society were able to participate in their liberation from Saddam Hussein's genocidal tyranny--will not accept the restoration of a centralized Arab dictatorship, or an Islamist regime that tries to impose Sharia law on them. Furthermore, they have been betrayed enough times by foreign powers playing The Great Game that they will not surrender their independent military power in exchange for here-today-gone-tomorrow American guarantees of their autonomy.

At the same time, many Arab Iraqis, especially Sunnis, view the Kurds as traitors. This would especially be the case if it's true, as some press reports indicated, that the United States used Kurdish pesh merga fighters in its brutal and abortive siege of Fallujah--to say nothing of the ethnic cleansing and counter-cleansing taking place in the Kirkuk region.

4) Imperialism cannot solve the problem of Iraqi unity. Various so-called "experts" have argued whether U.S. policy should be holding Iraq together by force, or compelling its separation into three mini-states. Neither course is viable imposed from outside. Only the Iraqi people can determine their own future.

To do this, terms of regional government, sharing of oil resources, resolution of refugee grievances and a Constitutional guarantee of the right of Kurdish self-determination would have to be negotiated among authentic representative institutions of all sectors of Iraqi society. Whether they could accomplish this cannot be known in advance; what is certain is that it cannot be done in the presence of the imperialist occupation.

End the Occupation--Now!

From the ashes of a failed and deadly occupation of Iraq, it can be said at least that some healthy flowers are blooming—in particular, a potential revived U.S. and international antiwar movement. But some poisonous weeds are sprouting as well. The worldwide network of U.S. torture centers at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere is one. Another is a new emerging "bipartisan" approach to maintaining the occupation in disguise.

The disastrous aftermath of triumphant Bush "preemptive war" has forced this administration, crudely and unevenly, back toward a so-called "multilateral" track of grudging collaboration with traditional European allies and the United Nations. Waiting with open arms to welcome this shift are the Democrats and John Kerry. While the two parties eagerly bash each other for their respective arrogance, lack of patriotism, incompetence, backstabbing and general unfitness to govern, they come together around a joint theme: "Whether or not the war in Iraq was a good idea, we have to move beyond how we got there. We can't leave now and let terrorists and Baathists create chaos there."

Everyone who remembers or has studied the Vietnam War knows this argument.

Yes, Iraq is in chaos now--a chaos not of its own people's making, but a chaos created by the United States (and the other powers) who supported Saddam Hussein for over a decade, then bombed Iraq and imposed sanctions, destroyed its economy and essential infrastructure, and finally invaded it, took over and stood by as everything down to the plumbing fixtures was looted. And now the same government (or governments, if you prefer the "multilateral" approach) are supposed to safeguard Iraq "until the people are ready to rule themselves"?

Our answer is: The Iraqi people will be ready to rule themselves the minute they're organized and strong enough to throw "us" out. Do they "need help"? Sure, but not from George W. Bush and L. Paul Bremer III and Tony Blair. They need solidarity from an international antiwar movement that demands "U.S. Out" and reparations for the enormous damage that imperialism has inflicted on Iraq.

At the same time, Socialists and labor activists in particular should build links to the emerging Iraqi trade unions that are struggling simultaneously against occupation and exploitation, against Bremer's decrees upholding Saddam's anti-labor laws and the religious fanatic thugs who take time out from chanting "Death to America" to smash up workers' demonstrations.

As in all colonial and national liberation struggles, the way in which the struggle is waged today will determine whether workers, women and national minorities have rights and power when their country is free. If the struggle for democracy and human rights is to be won, it must be fought at one and the same time as the struggle for national freedom itself. In our solidarity with Iraq as elsewhere, socialists do not separate these struggles into "stages" or separate compartments.

This document was drafted by David Finkel for the July, 2004 Solidarity national convention.



SOLIDARITY BASIS OF POLITICAL AGREEMENT (amended 2004)

- 1. Capitalism is an outmoded social system now deep in crisis.** This crisis is producing the beginning of a declining standard of living and an escalating drive toward war. This crisis is the unavoidable outcome of capital's most basic drives. Humanity will only be freed from the barbarism of war, environmental devastation, poverty, unemployment and declining living standards for millions when capitalism has been displaced by a rational, planned and democratic and participatory economic system: socialism.
- 2. Socialism is the political and economic rule of the working class,** in which the means of production are under the social ownership of the working class, which democratically plans economic life. The working class organizes its political and economic rule through councils of workers and popular representatives, freely chosen among a variety of organized working class and popular parties.
- 3. Socialism can only be achieved by a revolutionary mass political movement of the working class** which ends the political rule of the capitalist class and private ownership of the means of production.
- 4. The aim of this organization is to build a revolutionary socialist movement in the working class** and allied sectors of the oppressed. Membership is open to all who share our principles and work toward achieving them.
- 5. The capitalist parties, especially the Republican and Democratic parties, are fundamentally anti-working class, racist and sexist.** We oppose any form of participation in or support for these parties. We call for the working class and its allies to form a new, independent political party that fights for their needs.
- 6. The capitalist crisis has set in motion an employers' offensive** that necessitates national and international labor solidarity as well as organizing the unorganized. The labor bureaucracy for the most part acts as a brake on labor action. We therefore support all efforts to transform the unions into militant vehicles, including rank and file groupings within the unions as well as coalitions against concessions and strike support committees.
- 7. Racial and national oppression divide the working class** and create poverty and misery for millions. We join in the fight against racism, such as the struggle for affirmative action, and support the efforts of oppressed national minorities to organize independently for their liberation.
- 8. We fight for women's liberation,** and for women's equality today. The oppression of women within the family and in society divides the working class, keeps women's wages low and burdens women unequally in the task of social reproduction.
- 9. We are supporters of lesbian and gay liberation,** of their struggles for civil rights and against all forms of anti-gay bigotry. We support, as with all oppressed groups, the efforts of gays and lesbians to organize independently for their liberation.
- 10. We are internationalists.** We support movements for self-determination and national liberation throughout the world and the struggles of workers for better living standards and social and political power everywhere. Whatever may be our differing theoretical analyses of any particular struggle, we are unconditional defenders of movements for genuine trade unionism and workers' democracy.

11. **We actively oppose the growing drive towards war**, whether that be in the form of intervention in Central America, the Middle East or elsewhere, or the buildup of the U.S. war machine. We fight for unilateral disarmament in the U.S. and, at the same time, we extend our solidarity to the independent peace movements of Eastern Europe.

12. **Toward these ends we are committed** to building an effective revolutionary socialist organization in the U.S. capable of acting together without presenting a monolithic face to the world or engaging in pretenses of being "the vanguard."

We are socialists who stand for feminism, anti-racism, and grassroots democracy. You may be wondering how to join Solidarity. If you are in general agreement with our twelve points of political agreement and are committed to building social movements and willing to contribute monthly dues, or if you would like more information, please call or e-mail us, or detach the coupon below and send back to us.

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