

# U.S. occupation at Root of Violence in Iraq

U.S. forces creating divide amongst Iraqis

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Global Research, February 12, 2007

Workers World 11 February 2007

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)  
Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO](#)  
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The Bush administration released on Feb. 1 a vile four-page summary of a longer classified report on Iraq called the National Intelligence Estimate. Prepared by 16 U.S. intelligence agencies active there, the summary described the situation in Iraq as going from bad to worse.

That conclusion is probably the only statement in the report that is true. The rest, prepared by the same spy agencies that in 2002 backed up all the Bush administration's false claims of "weapons of mass destruction" and Iraq's "links to terrorism," is a series of distortions and slanders of the Iraqis. With unintentional irony it suggests that the Pentagon, which brought "shock and awe" to Iraq, now has to stay to pacify the Iraqis, who are plagued with a genetic or cultural "ready recourse to violence."

The problems in Iraq are described in the report in the same way that the corporate media defines the chaos there. Rather than summarize these false arguments that everyone has heard so often until they seem to be part of the air we breathe, this article will debunk them with historical truth and show who is to blame for the "unraveling" of Iraq.

**It is important first to recognize that the "sectarian violence" in Iraq today has no precedence in Iraq's history. The now common bombings and assassinations in Baghdad were uncommon even during the first two years of U.S. occupation, and those that occurred were understood as political attacks on occupation forces and their collaborators.**

At the time of the 2003 U.S. invasion Iraq was considered the most secular state in the region, with a strong national identity. Shiites and Sunnis lived in intermixed neighborhoods in major cities such as Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk. They often intermarried. Their religious differences were less pronounced than those between Catholic and Protestant groups in the U.S. today.

## Shiites in Baath Party

Before 2003, both the Iraq Army and government bureaucracy were organized on a secular basis. Now nearly every article in the corporate media states that the Shiites in Iraq were totally oppressed and completely excluded from all positions of power. This is an intentionally divisive myth and was exposed in an Al-Jazeera article on Dec. 19, 2006, entitled "Media bias 'threat' to Iraq."

"Information about Iraq propagated by Western media is often woefully inaccurate or

downright wrong, according to leading Arab figures, and such distortions are damaging any chance of peace in the country," says the article.

The article quotes a spokesperson from the Arab Baath Socialist Party, the ruling political party in Iraq from 1968 to 2003: **"Most Western media outlets have been helping the U.S. occupation authorities to portray the Baath party as a Sunni party which suppressed the Shia and deprived them of their rights. ... The Committee of Debaathification issued a list of 100,000 senior Iraqi Baathists who would not be allowed to enjoy governmental posts, 66,000 of them were Shia—so how is the Baath party a Sunni party?"**

And at the top of the Baath party? Consider the U.S. occupation's own list of 55 top Iraqi officials who they wanted dead or alive, starting with President Saddam Hussein. Of this famous "deck of cards," half were Shiite; others were Sunnis, along with Christian and Kurds, according to this same article.

### **Occupation is root of violence**

The U.S. invasion and occupation is responsible for the violence in Iraq today. Journalists, correspondents and editors omit this basic underlying fact in almost all coverage of "sectarian violence." The U.S. occupation army, its officials, its contractors—another name for mercenaries—wreak violence daily. They are not innocent bystanders who stumbled into the country to bring democracy and reconciliation.

Before the 1991 U.S. war, Iraq had the highest standard of living in the region, full literacy and full free health care.

Pentagon air power unleashed 110,000 aerial sorties in 1991, targeting every industrial complex, communications center, reservoir, pumping station, filtration plant and food processing plant in the country, along with schools, hospitals and housing. Sporadic U.S. bombing continued for 12 years, along with U.S. and U.N. imposed starvation sanctions. This created an artificial famine, designed to strangle the entire country, and led to 1.5 million Iraqi deaths. Then came the 2003 U.S. massive bombardment, invasion and occupation.

### **Occupiers set up a sectarian structure**

The U.S. "occupation authority," headed by L. Paul Bremer, then began to set up a structure that accentuated sectarian differences. Bremer closed down all the state-owned industries, started privatizing the formerly publicly owned oil resources of Iraq, and installed a hand-picked group of collaborators into office, most of whom had lived outside Iraq for over 30 years.

The collaborators were part of the old corrupt feudal class, who had been overthrown in the 1958 Iraqi Revolution. Reinstalled by the U.S., they revived the old system of clan chiefs that British colonialism had relied on, along with the most reactionary religious fundamentalists. Still, they had to demonstrate their craven loyalty by organizing witch hunts that rounded up former Baath Party members.

Bremer purged tens of thousands of Iraqi teachers, technicians, scientists and administrators at every level of government who had previously belonged to the Baath Party. This "debaathification" program barred them from working, holding office, or even

voting.

The occupation authority decided who could run for office and form political parties, favoring those based on religious sects, with the elections organized strictly along sectarian lines. Since the armed resistance to the U.S. occupation was strongest in the mainly Sunni areas, Shiite and Kurdish-based parties received a larger portion of the seats in parliament and the control of ministries where they could hand out thousands of jobs and government appointments. The U.S. forces then used the threat of isolation to cajole some Sunnis into collaborating with the occupation.

The U.S. occupation authority also organized the Iraqi military units on a sectarian basis. They consciously used Shia units in Sunni areas and Sunni units against Shia resistance, while the media emphasized the sectarian fighting. **The Iraqi media is hardly an independent force. To assure a U.S.-friendly line, the Pentagon awarded a \$96 million contract to a U.S. communications company, Harris Corp., to establish the al-Iraqiya television and radio network and a national newspaper. The U.S. occupation forces appointed the directors, producers, staff and the journalists.**

The U.S. occupation authority also pushed through a constitution that further hardened religious antagonisms and regional differences. Iraqis warned when this constitution was rushed to a vote in October 2005 that it would push the rights of women back 50 years, break the central government and promote sectarianism and even civil war.

Before 1991, rights for women in Iraq were the most advanced in the region.

While Washington always paid lip service to supporting a united Iraq, heightening the divisions among Iraqis was always part of Washington's war plans. The constitution was actually drafted prior to the U.S. invasion by a task force of Iraqi expatriates the U.S. State Department pulled together. The final constitution gave both provinces and competing ministries the power to have their own security forces.

### **Washington's hidden hand**

Even without covert operations to stir up trouble, the U.S. occupation has created the structure and put the divisive policies in place. In an impoverished, war-torn country they have brought into office thousands of collaborators whose position and continued privileges are based on a divided, occupied and traumatized Iraq.

That there are at least 16 secret U.S. intelligence agencies, each with its own agenda and agents operating in Iraq, is another source of violence and instability. There are now 100,000 contractors working for the U.S. in Iraq, with some 30,000 to 50,000 working in "security" (Washington Post, Dec. 5, 2006). These are all hired guns. In addition the Israeli Mossad and other countries' Special Forces have committed personnel.

The arrest on Sept. 19, 2005, of two British agents disguised as Arab "terrorists" with a car full of explosives in Basra raised international speculation and wide suspicion of a hidden hand behind the bombings there. Unable to secure the release of their two disguised terrorists from the local police, British forces took extraordinary action and bulldozed the police compound and jail in order to free them before they could be interrogated.

### **['Divide and rule' Iraq?](#)**

Both Washington rightist neo-cons and liberal commentators have argued that the only way to subdue and control Iraq is to divide it into a Kurdish north, Sunni center and Shiite south.

This view was strongly advocated by Peter Galbraith in the book "The End of Iraq" and in his columns in New Republic, which have been reprinted across the U.S. Earlier, Galbraith's view prevailed regarding Yugoslavia and he became the U.S. ambassador to Croatia. He viewed the unraveling of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia as essential to U.S. hegemony.

Leslie Gelb, a former editor and columnist for the New York Times and president emeritus of the Rockefeller-created Council on Foreign Relations, also raised this view in a widely published article, "The Three-State Solution." (New York Times, Nov. 26, 2003) Gelb contrasted the problems in Iraq to imperialism's success in breaking up Yugoslavia.

Another commentator given wide coverage is David Brooks, who sees NATO-occupied Bosnia as a "model that could help stabilize Iraq. Brooks applauds the resurgence of American hegemony and calls for a soft partition of Iraq. He is a regular columnist for the New York Times and Washington Post, a contributing editor at Newsweek, and a commentator on PBS's News Hour with Jim Lehrer and NPR's All Things Considered.

The imperialist strategy of the U.S., and earlier Britain and France, has always been based on «divide and rule. This was their policy toward the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, the Indian sub-continent and Western Asia, also known as the Middle East.

To control the Middle East the colonial powers played on differences and hostility between communities, whether they be Sunni and Shiite, Druze and Christians on the one hand, or Kurds, Iranians and other nationalities on the other. Breaking areas into mini-states was the imperialist response to the revolutionary challenge of anti-colonial pan-Arab nationalism. Today it is the response to pan-Islamic resistance.

The official U.S. position has always been to support a unified, sovereign and democratic Iraq. With so many top imperialist commentators urging a violent breakup, however, it would be naive to assume there are no agencies involved in planning its execution.

Many analysts see this division as the only way to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat. For example, in a Jan. 14, 2005, article in Newsweek, in an article titled The Salvador option, the subhead read: The Pentagon may put Special Forces-led assassination or kidnapping teams in Iraq. In other words, death squads.

The growing mass enthusiasm in the region over Washington's humiliation in Iraq and Israel's stunning setback in Lebanon threaten all of the corrupt feudal regimes and military dictatorships held in place by U.S. military power. Popular resistance and unity are a threat to imperialist domination.

The U.S. client regimes in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan and Egypt have stepped forward with the full power of their media in the Arab world to push daily news coverage that heightens the divisions, suspicion and antagonisms between Sunni and Shiite religious sects.

While the chaos of deepening sectarian conflict and civil war will take a devastating toll on the entire Iraqi population, it will not necessarily help the U.S. occupation stabilize its rule in Iraq or in the region. The conflict could instead take on a radical anti-U.S. character and lead

to wider anti-imperialist resistance throughout the entire region.

All groupings are distrustful of the U.S. and feel betrayed by U.S. promises because the occupation has brought insecurity, misery and chaos to all of Iraq.

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