

Washington supported the more rightist elements within the post-revolution political structure against the communist and left-nationalist forces. For example, the United States backed the overthrow and assassination of President Abdel Karim Kassem in 1963 by a right-wing military grouping. And Washington applauded the suppression of the left and unions by the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party governments in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1980s, the United States encouraged and helped to fund and arm Iraq, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, in its war against Iran. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger revealed the real U.S. attitude about the war: "I hope they kill each other."

Bourgeois governments in both Iran and Iraq pursued the war for expansionist aims. The war was a disaster for both Iran and Iraq, killing a million people and weakening both countries.

The collapse of the USSR and the Gulf War

Shortly after the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, developments in the Soviet Union posed a new and even graver danger. In pursuit of an illusory "permanent détente" with the United States, the Gorbachev leadership in Moscow was eliminating or sharply cutting back its support for allies in the developing world.

In 1989, Gorbachev withdrew support for the socialist governments in Eastern Europe, most of which then collapsed. This sharp shift in the world relationship of forces, culminating with the collapse of the Soviet Union itself two years later, opened the door for the U.S. war against Iraq in 1991 – and for more than a decade of sanctions/blockade and bombing that severely weakened Iraq and its people.

It would have been inconceivable even a few years earlier that Soviet leaders would have stood by while the United States sent more than a half-million troops to attack a nearby country with which the USSR had a mutual defense agreement.

Rather than ushering in a new era of peace, the counter-revolutionary overturn of the government of the USSR and throughout the socialist camp was seen in Washington as the green light for a new round of wars and interventions from Panama to Somalia to Yugoslavia.

The counter-revolution in the Soviet Union paved the way for U.S. aggression and counter-revolution in Iraq,

the negation of Iraq's sovereignty and the destruction of the structures that made it an independent state.

Having achieved their victory, however, the occupiers now confront a people who have a long and proud history of resistance. The anti-war movement here and around the world must give its unconditional support to the Iraqi anti-colonial resistance.

By Richard Becker

Richard Becker is a West Coast coordinator of the International Action Center, and a member of the International A.N.S.W.E.R. Coalition Steering Committee. He has traveled to Iraq and throughout the Middle East several times, frequently with Ramsey Clark, former U.S. Attorney General.

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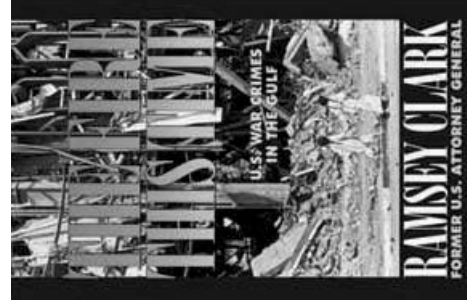
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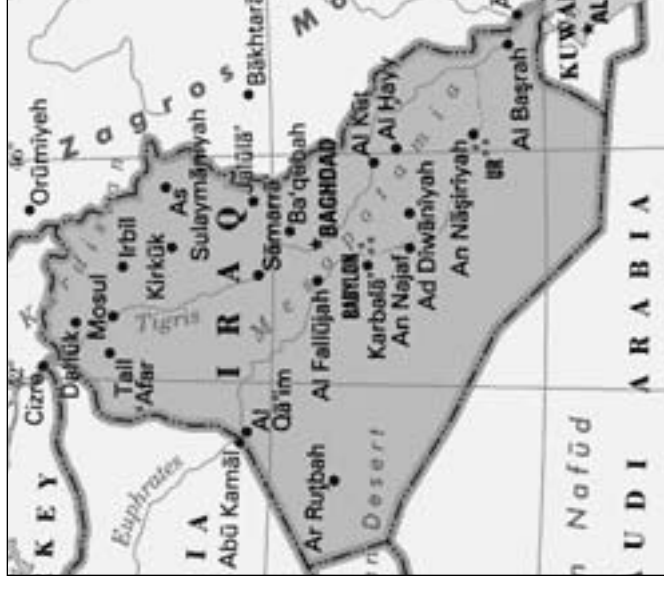
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In April 2003 the U.S. and British rulers finally achieved what they had wanted to do since July 1958:

the counter-revolution in Iraq. But erasing 45 years of independence from a people's consciousness is no easy task, and the occupiers face a future of resistance to their imperial rule.

The counter-revolution in Iraq – executed by the vastly superior or firepower of the world's lone superpower – is a heavy blow not only to the Iraqi people, but to all those struggling for liberation in the Middle East.

The imperialist takeover of the biggest and most populous Arab state in the Gulf region gravely threatens Syria, Lebanon, Iran and the Palestinian people. It is not a coincidence that the crushing of Iraq was immediately followed by the unveiling of Bush's "road map" for the



Palestinians. In the aftermath of the first Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first President George Bush launched the now-defunct Oslo "peace process."

Last month, on April 9, organized military resistance in Baghdad and most of Iraq suddenly ended. Iraq had by then endured three weeks of air-, ground- and sea-based attacks by "coalition" – U.S. and British – forces.

The circumstances surrounding the collapse of the Iraqi government and state remain unclear, but the relief in the ruling circles of Washington and London was apparent. From the beginning of the war, Washington pursued a strategy of "decapitation" – either killing the Iraqi leadership or fomenting a coup d'état.

The longer the war continued, the greater the possibility of new upheavals in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Islamic world.

Relief was quickly replaced by limitless U.S. triumphalism – and the announcement that the invaders were now hunting the leaders of the ousted regime, the same way that in earlier manifestations of colonialism the authorities tracked and killed the leaders of defeated slave revolts. The images of Iraqi officials were grotesquely imprinted on decks of playing cards, with Saddam Hussein as the Ace of Spades.

U.S. leaders and their corporate media have relentlessly promoted the idea that their goal of "regime change" simply involved removing the ultrademonized Hussein and his immediate circle. In reality, Washington's aim was to destroy everything that made Iraq an independent state.

Everything is gone – from the military to the government ministries to the state-run food-distribution and health-care systems.

In the aftermath of the war, Iraq is under a Pentagon military dictatorship. Meetings of U.S.-picked Iraqi "leaders" are now being held to set up a puppet "interim government."

The commander of U.S. ground forces in Iraq, Lt. Gen. David McKiernan, made it clear that these Iraqi leaders are little more than ornamentation. On April 23, McKiernan issued a blunt proclamation stating, "The coalition alone retains absolute authority within Iraq." U.S. diplomatic and intelligence officials are slated to

be the directors of all the new Iraqi ministries set up by the military dictatorship.

Early in the war, U.S. military forces seized the great prize in Iraq, the rich oil fields in the north and south. Iraq holds an estimated 12 percent of the world's proven petroleum reserves, second only to Saudi Arabia.

Iraq before the revolution

U.S. involvement in Iraq began in the 1920s. U.S. corporations were granted 23.75 percent of Iraq's oil as a reward for entering World War I on the side of the victorious British and French empires. Britain, France and the Netherlands received equal shares of Iraq's petroleum resources.

Iraq was then a newly created colony, or "mandate," in the far-flung British Empire. Because of fierce resistance to colonial domination by Arabs and Kurds alike, Britain granted Iraq its nominal independence in 1932. But the country was ruled by a British-installed monarchy, and continued to be occupied by British military bases.

To fortify their domination, the British promoted the development of a class of big landowners in Iraq, who exported grain, dates and other products. The peasants who constituted the majority of the population were treated as serfs, bound to the land and living in utter poverty.

In the 1950s, life expectancy in Iraq was 28-30 years. Infant mortality was estimated at 300-350 per 1,000 live births. By comparison, infant mortality in England at the time was around 25 per 1,000 births.

Illiteracy was more than 80 percent for men and 90



percent for women. Diseases related to malnutrition and unsanitary water were rampant.

A statistical survey at the time showed income of less than 13 Fils – 4 cents – per day for individual peasants in Diwaniya, one of the more prosperous agricultural regions.

According to a 1952 World Bank (IBRD) report, the average yearly income for all Iraqis was \$82. For peasants it was \$21. ("Revolution in Iraq," Society of Graduates of American Universities in Iraq, 1959)

The richest of the landlord families was named Chalabi. They owned vast estates in southern Iraq. Today it is Ahmed Chalabi, son of this same family, who is the Pentagon favorite to become the new "leader" of Iraq.

Neocolonial and landlord rule was maintained by a ruthless secret police/ military regime that tortured, murdered and imprisoned countless thousands of Iraqis. Still, the resistance was strong. In the face of it, Iraq was placed under martial law 11 times between 1935 and 1954, for a total of nine years and four months.

Underlying Iraq's extreme poverty was this simple fact: Iraq owned none of its vast oil reserves.

The U.S. and Iraq

In the latter stages of World War II, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, dominated by big banking, oil and other corporate interests, were determined to restructure the post-war world to ensure the dominant position of the United States.

The key elements in their strategy were: 1) U.S. military superiority in nuclear and conventional weaponry; 2) U.S. domination of newly created international institutions like the United Nations, Inter national Monetary Fund and World Bank, and establishment of the dollar as the world currency; 3) control of global resources, particularly oil.

In pursuit of the latter, the United States was intent on taking control of certain strategic assets of the British Empire, war-time alliance notwithstanding. Among those assets was Iraq.

A February 1944 exchange between Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill makes clear that the British were well aware of U.S. intentions. Churchill wrote Roosevelt: "Thank you very much for your assurances about no sheep's eyes [looking enviously]"

on our oilfields in Iran and Iraq. Let me reciprocate by giving you the fullest assurance that we have no thought of trying to horn in upon your interests or property in Saudi Arabia." (quoted in Gabriel Kolko, The Politics of War, New York, 1968)

What this note clearly showed was that the U.S. leaders were so intent on taking over Iran and Iraq, both important neo-colonies of Britain, that it had set off alarm bells in British ruling circles.

It is also worth noting that Saddam Hussein was just 7 years old in 1944, when the U.S. leaders fixed their sights on Iraq.

Despite Churchill's bluster, there was nothing the British could do to restrain rising U.S. power. Within a few years, the British would adapt to the new reality and accept its new role as Washington's junior partner.

In 1953, after the CIA coup that put the shah (king) in power in Iran, the U.S. took control of that country. And by the mid-1950s, Iraq was jointly controlled by the United States and Britain.

In 1955 Washington set up the Baghdad Pact, which included its client regimes in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Iraq, along with Britain.

The Baghdad Pact, or CENTO – Central Treaty Organization, had two purposes. First, to oppose the rise of Arab and other liberation movements in the Middle East and south Asia. And second, to be another in a series of military alliances – NATO, SEATO and ANZUS were the others – encircling the socialist camp of the Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe, North Korea and North Vietnam.

The Iraqi Revolution

But on July 14, 1958, a military rebellion led by Brigadier Abdul Karim Kassem and the Free Officers movement turned into a country-wide revolution. The king and his administration were suddenly gone, the recipients of people's justice.

The 1958 revolution put an end to colonial domination and marked the beginning of Iraq's real independence. Although the Iraqi Communist Party was the biggest

organized force among the revolutionary forces, the revolution did not lead to a socialist transformation of the country. The ICP strategy was alliance with the anti-colonial nationalist bourgeoisie.

Though not a socialist revolution, the Iraqi Revolution created panic in Washington and on Wall Street. President Dwight Eisenhower called it "the gravest crisis since the Korean War."

The day after the Iraqi Revolution, 20,000 U.S. Marines began landing in Lebanon. The day after that, 6,600 British paratroopers were dropped into Jordan.

The U.S. and British expeditionary forces went in to save the neo-colonial governments in Lebanon and Jordan. Had they not, the popular impulse from Iraq would have surely brought down the Western-dependent regimes in Beirut and Amman.

But Eisenhower and his generals had something else in mind as well: invading Iraq, overturning the revolution and re-installing a puppet government in Baghdad.



Three factors forced Washington to abandon that plan in 1958: 1) the sweeping character of the Iraqi Revolution; 2) the announcement by the United Arab Republic – Syria and Egypt were then one state that bordered Iraq – that its forces would fight the imperialists if they sought to invade; and, 3) strong support for the revolution from the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. The USSR began to mobilize troops in the southern Soviet republics close to Iraq.

The combination of these factors forced the U.S. leaders to accept the existence of Iraqi Revolution. But Washington never really reconciled itself to the loss of Iraq.

Over the next three decades, the United States applied many tactics designed to weaken and undermine Iraq as an independent country. At various times – for instance after Iraq completed nationalizing the Iraqi Petroleum Company in 1972 and signed a defense treaty with the USSR – the United States gave massive military support to Kurdish elements fighting Baghdad and added Iraq to its list of "terrorist states."