

# *Chaos in Iraq: Why the U.S. Occupation is the Main Problem, Not the “Solution”*

by Rich Whitney, Illinois Green Party

Even though the invasion and occupation of Iraq was illegal, immoral and unjustified from the start, many politicians and commentators still express the view that the U.S. occupation of Iraq remains an unfortunate “necessity.” Some of them concede that the invasion was a “mistake,” yet persist in the argument, “Now that we’re in Iraq, to pull out now would be irresponsible.”

However, if you closely examine the arguments for keeping our armed forces in Iraq, *none of them make any sense*. Let’s consider the most common arguments:

***“The Sunnis and Shia are at each other’s throats. If we abandon Iraq now, it will descend into chaos and civil war.”***

Leaving aside the fact that Iraq has already descended into chaos, this argument is baseless. Prior to the U.S. invasion, there was little conflict between Sunni and Shia Moslems in Iraq. Many articles that discuss the history of the Sunni-Shia divide exaggerate the occasional episodes of violent conflict, ignoring the fact that the two sects have generally coexisted peacefully. This is especially so in Iraq, where Sunni and Shia have lived and worked together in integrated tribal communities for generations. It is only since – and because of – the U.S. invasion and occupation, that certain forces have begun carrying out acts of sectarian violence.

There is considerable evidence that this has actually been a part of the Bush administration’s policy for dominating the country, applying the old maxim, “Divide and conquer.”

As resistance to the U.S. occupation grew in 2004, U.S. military commanders decided to train Shia and Kurdish fighters to carry out what they call “irregular missions” against Sunni rebels. This policy was called the “El Salvador Option,” named after the U.S.-backed policy in Central America in the 1980s. At that time, U.S.-funded military regimes were trained to create “death squads” – clandestine military units that terrorized, tortured and murdered civilians who were merely suspected of having sympathy toward rebel organizations, or even unions and human rights organizations. The Central American death squads were responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, as well as unspeakable torture and terror.

It’s no coincidence that the wave of sectarian violence that has swept Iraq since 2004 followed the appointment of John Negroponte as U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. Negroponte was U.S. ambassador to Honduras in 1981-85, where he worked with the military regime in power, despite its human rights abuses, to promote the terrorist “contra” war in Nicaragua. He was joined in Iraq by retired Col. James Steele, who has served as advisor to Iraqi security forces. Steele was commander of U.S. military advisors in El Salvador from 1984-86.

In late 2005, the Interior Ministry was placed in the hands of Bayan Jabr, a leader of the Badr militia, a Shia paramilitary group. Commandos and so-called “public order brigades” under the same Ministry were drawn from the Badr and other Shia militias. The death squads sowing terror in Iraq are basically the same government forces, operating outside their “official” role. Gen. Yassin al-Dulaimi, a deputy minister of the Interior who opposes the death squads, has publicly exposed the connection. A Sept. 2005 U.N. human rights report held Interior Ministry forces responsible for an organized campaign of detentions, torture and killings. It reported that the special police commando units accused of carrying out the killings had been trained by U.S. forces, under the guidance of Col. Steele.

In short, the “bloody Sunni-Shia conflict” is itself a product of *our government’s policy in Iraq*. If U.S. forces left, the conflict might continue for a time but the chances for accommodation, peace and stability would be greatly improved.

***“We have an obligation to remain until the new, democratically elected government can survive on its own against the insurgents.”***

Although the “purple finger revolution” was an effective public relations event, it was not a genuine exercise in democracy. “Democracy” cannot be imposed at the point of a gun. An occupier coercing or enticing people to vote is not democracy. If democracy means anything, it must mean real control of government by the people themselves.

The elections followed the destruction of Falluja, which caused most Sunni Muslims to boycott them. Many of those who did vote likely did so in the hope that it would help speed a U.S. withdrawal. Because the vote took place under U.S. auspices, which steered the process, the

resulting government has little credibility among the Iraqi people and little authority outside of the Green Zone. Many Iraqis regard the government, accurately, as a collaborator with the U.S. occupation. It doesn't represent the wishes or views of the Iraqi people.

Because the government could not survive long without U.S. support, it remains heavily under the domineering influence of the U.S. government. Even now, our government is heavily pressuring the Iraqi government to adopt a new "hydrocarbon law" that would open the country's nationalized oil system to foreign corporate control – which points to the real motives underlying the continued occupation.

The Iraqi people have the right of self-determination. They should have the right to determine their own course and their own form of government, without the U.S. pulling their strings. Public opinion polls in Iraq have shown that huge majorities of the people support a rapid withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, that they regard the U.S. as a hostile, occupying force and that they believe peace and stability are *more* likely to follow a U.S. withdrawal than a continued occupation. If we really believe in democracy, we should respect the wishes of the Iraqi people.

***"We have to stay until we defeat the terrorists. If we leave now (or set a time for withdrawal), it will only encourage the terrorists and they will take over."***

This line of "reasoning" ignores the fact that there were no terrorists in Iraq until after the invasion. While Al Qaeda fighters may be in Iraq now, they are not the principal force behind the resistance movements in Iraq – and if the U.S. forces weren't there, they would be far less welcome. Most of the people attacking U.S. and Iraqi government forces are Iraqi groups (both Sunni and Shia) that aim to drive out the occupiers. They are no terrorist threat to the United States; they just want the U.S. occupiers out of their country.

In sum, the U.S. presence in Iraq itself is the problem – creating both a growing internal resistance movement *and* acting as a magnet for outsiders bent on attacking U.S. forces. Maintaining our forces in Iraq today simply provides both sets of forces with more targets. It is pointless and counterproductive – except from the point of view of those who wish to *use* our troops in their quest to control sources of oil.

This also means that there is no way to "win" the conflict, because our military's presence in Iraq is what is *generating* the conflict and growing resistance. Our government has ignored the most fundamental lesson of the Vietnam War: You cannot achieve a military "victory"

over a people that don't want you in their country.

***"We're fighting the terrorists there so that we don't have to fight them here."***

This is a clever-sounding slogan but on further examination it is revealed as nonsense. To accept this argument, one would have to believe that the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq has somehow prevented, interrupted or deterred terrorists from traveling to the United States to attack us "here." That implies that our presence in Iraq somehow caused terrorists to change their travel plans, or that our troops in Iraq have been busy confiscating their airline tickets.

Of course, the whole point of terrorist tactics are to terrorize *civilians* in their *home* country, not attack armed soldiers abroad who can fight back. The limited numbers or ability of terrorists to gain entry and sow terror in the United States has nothing to do with the occupation of Iraq.

Furthermore, the continued presence of our military unlawfully occupying and attempting to control Iraq can only serve to generate *more* resistance among the people of Iraq and the Middle East. And as our own military and its Iraqi collaborators inflict more civilian casualties, terror and torture of their own, they will ultimately cause *more* people to hate the United States and turn to terrorist methods.

There are no good reasons for a continued U.S. military presence in Iraq: There are only bad reasons – namely, to carry out the ill-conceived plans of a power-hungry elite, bent on controlling Middle East oil and stuffing the coffers of Big Oil, the military-industrial complex and their favored contractors. The occupation enables the government and Big Oil to fleece us at home while they oppress the Iraqi people abroad.

The only sensible policy is to stop further damage and death – by withdrawing U.S. forces from Iraq, completely and immediately. We call on our fellow U.S. citizens to make that a central demand on our government. No more excuses, no more compromises, no more funding for a senseless war: Join us in calling for "Troops out now!"

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