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An Anarchist Critique of the Iraq War
2006

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A principle tenet of anarchism is, or should be, self-identification. People will identify themselves, and their oppressors, in a variety of ways, and they have a right to. It is not solely a class war, and not everyone will identify their oppressors as the owning class, or the state. Accordingly, not everyone will identify as an anarchist. We need to recognize this, and build solidarity regardless, supporting anti-authoritarianism wherever we find it. The Iraq War is a call to action for anarchists, and that is where every truly anarchist analysis should leave us — in action. There is cause to challenge US militarism, and many anarchists in this country are doing so by targeting military recruiting. There is also cause to challenge the beneficiaries of US imperialism in Iraq, not just the obvious profiteers, but also the corporations and institutions relating to US racism and state power, recognizing all the elements comprising the occupation (and in attacking, illuminating them and their role). And there is cause to broaden the struggle by connecting with other people who suffer under US imperialism, in Iraq and around the world.

Key Sources

- Monthly news briefs, including major events and developments in Iraq since the invasion, can be found out www.signalfire.org/news
- The PIPA/ University of Maryland study (January 2006) can be found at: www.worldpublicopinion.org
- An article on Iraq's colonial history can be found at: www.hartford-hwp.com
- Information on Iraqi resistance groups can be found at: www.globalpolicy.org

Our assertion that the major print and broadcast media serve the interests of state and capital prevent us from being surprised that their coverage of the current crisis in Iraq leaves the public confounded and misinformed. To Americans, Iraq is an inexplicable episode best ignored, a tragic quagmire somehow lacking the moral clarity that until recently surrounded the US invasion of Afghanistan. It is highly troubling, for Americans bred with a galactic sense of entitlement, when God does not come out on our side, so the ruling politicians attempt to soothe the public confusion with assurances about specific tactics, while opposition politicians criticize the chosen strategies — there weren't enough troops on the ground, or: the sanctions were doing the job just fine, why'd ya have to go and stir things up? Progressive dissidents attempt to question the government's fundamental motives: the US invaded Iraq for oil, to boost the defense industry, to settle a score between Saddam and the Bush family. None of these explanations satisfy in the long run. If war is the result of the personal motivations of the head of state and his favored corporate backers, why has every single administration in US history engaged in acts of war against other nations? Clearly, a deeper explanation is needed.

Because people are talking about Iraq in a way that was absent for the military operations/occupation in Haiti, Afghanistan, Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and South Korea (to name the major interventions this decade), we should be more active in using the opportunity to spread an anti-authoritarian critique of US imperialism that finally explains why war is the health of the state, and what exactly that means. As long as Americans enjoy pretensions of surprise and confusion with each new invasion, we are faced with a serious failure to communicate. When history repeats itself for the hundredth time, it has gone far beyond farce.

Background

History

As a basis for understanding the US war in Iraq, we would be well served by better understanding Iraq (and in the process, those of us not familiar with this history will learn a good deal about the US). Like the majority of states in the world, Iraq was not created by a self-identifying Iraqi people, but by European colonizers, in this case the British. In 1914, during World War I (one of the earlier wars of globalization, in which white governments fought for colonial possessions and dominant-nation status), the British invaded the oil-rich region of Mesopotamia, seizing it from the Ottoman Turks, who were themselves foreign occupiers of the Arabic and Kurdish inhabitants of the area. The British jammed together three Ottoman provinces and constituted it as a new country under their political and military control, enforcing a Western system of government based on the model of British India. (Later, they broke off Kuwait as a separate country for the convenience of British petroleum companies). The land contained distinct ethnic groups — Kurds and Arabs; and distinct religious groups — Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as some Christians.

A debate emerged among the British ruling class: should they micromanage Iraq and transform its society to fit British administration, molding obedient and culturally dependent British subjects? (It should be understood that destroying a people, as such, and absorbing them into the "mother country," backed by the violent force implicit in economic reorganization and the criminalization of native cultures, constitutes genocide; that colonialism, simply put, is inherently genocidal). The liberal alternative was to allow more flexibility as to the government of Iraq as long as it was governed competently and in accordance with British strategic interests (centered largely around the increasingly vital petroleum reserves, in addition to the captive market for British manufactures). This latter possibility is what Western governments mean when they speak of freedom: allowing subjugated populations to find their own way of following the commandments handed down to them;

And anarchists have a duty to oppose it. Ignoring a legitimate resistance, even if it has oppressive characteristics we cannot support, will keep anarchism irrelevant through much of the Global South. If the US loses in Iraq, this opens possibilities for liberation there and throughout the rest of the world. It is up to the Iraqis what new society they create, and it may well be a patriarchal or fundamentalist one, but that is not for us to decide — when fighting neocolonialism we must make sure not to apply a colonial mentality to resistance (e.g. teach them to do it our way or cut off all aid). A question that has not been answered in the anarchist movement relates to the propriety and logistics of supporting better segments of the Iraqi resistance to encourage anti-authoritarianism and women's liberation. What does critical solidarity look like, without being manipulative? But in many ways, this question is premature. There seem to be a lack of connections and communication. A priority for now may be to reach out to Iraqi communities in this country, translate and disseminate the communications of Iraqi resistance groups into English, and take the dangerous step of organizing trips to Iraq or neighboring countries to gather information and establish contacts.

Global Resistance

Resistance against US imperialism is global, and it extends beyond the specific war in Iraq, as it needs to. In the last year, protests against US military occupation and bases have occurred in Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Ireland, Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria; against US military involvement in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela, Pakistan, and elsewhere. We need to continue to make connections, not just against specific wars (because this war will end before US imperialism does) but against the status quo. A narrow economic analysis needs to be abandoned in favor of one that understands wars such as this one as part of globalization (not just for the hollow explanation of oil profits, but for power and control on a global level), and also comprehends the racist system of global slavery and colonialism, a cultural imperialism that exists not just to secure markets but to fulfill its inherent sense of superiority.

even most US anti-war activists, pretend that the resistance is a shadowy, unknown network of terrorists, when this is patently untrue.

There is a diversity of resistance groups, and many of them maintain websites and make public statements. Most of them are opposed to attacks against civilians. One group, the Iraqi National Islamic Resistance, (also known as "the 1920 Revolution Brigades" in a clear reference to earlier anti-imperialist struggles) started 16 July, 2003, with the aim "to liberate Iraqi territory from foreign military and political occupation and to establish a liberated and independent Iraqi state on Islamic bases." It launches armed attacks against US forces, primarily concentrated in the area west of Baghdad (Ninwi, Diyali, and Anbar). Among the Sunnis there are also several Ba'athist factions, mostly anti-Saddam. Shia groups include the Al Sadr militia and the Imam Ali Bin-Abi-Talib Jihadi Brigades, which appeared 12 October, 2003, vowing to kill the soldiers of any country sending its troops to support the coalition forces, and threatening to transfer the battleground to the territories of such countries if they were to send troops. The Jihadi Brigades, active in Najaf and Karbala, also threatened to assassinate all the members of the Interim Governing Council and any Iraqi cooperating with the coalition forces. There are four groups ideologically close to Al Qaida, but they are all very small and tend almost exclusively to kidnappings of foreigners sensationalized through the media.

Some of the groups in the resistance are Islamist, some secular, and some simply Muslim; parts of the resistance are rightwing while others have anti-imperialist leanings and still others focus on attacking the oil infrastructure, but they all seem to agree on the necessity of getting foreign troops out of their country. Anti-war activists in the US would do well to learn more about the Iraqi resistance, since it is only because of a successful and violent resistance that anyone is still paying attention to Iraq (rather than forgetting about it like everyone did with Haiti). And though it is important not to idealize the resistance, the far more present danger is succumbing to the racist stereotypes that an Iraqi resistance is inherently patriarchal, authoritarian, and brutish, without even doing our research. The fundamental truth is that regardless of any real or imagined shortcomings, the Iraqis have a right to resist occupation.

granting them a little leeway for minor digressions, as long as they do not challenge the constraints and priorities imposed on them. For Iraq, this meant a domestic elite could influence the face and the cultural flavor of their government, they could even be the ones holding the reins in certain bureaucracies, as long as they accepted the development of capitalism, and did not challenge the basic political foundations, British dominance, or the petroleum industry.

It was this liberal view that triumphed. However, Iraqis were not placated with the "mandate" the British so generously gave them. In 1920, they rose up in a major revolt, and it took the British several months and thousands of lives to suppress it. During the counterattack, Winston Churchill ordered the use of aerial bombardments and chemical warfare against Arab tribes, the same crimes of which Saddam Hussein is now accused. The rebellion convinced the British of the need to set up a fully functioning "Iraqi government." Without substantial brainwashing, people want to be free. Anarchy is the natural condition. Because domination creates opposition, the British understood the need to obscure the domination, or at least channel the opposition away from themselves and towards an easily replaceable puppet. So they gave Iraq a "king" (because rule by a foreigner is much more obvious than rule by a compatriot), and recruited Sunnis to rule over the majority Shia country they had created. Sunnis had been the officers and administrators under the Ottoman regime, so they were well versed in the tactics of domination. Using an ethnic minority to control a majority was also an old colonial standby. A minority attempting to rule a larger nation will be dependent on the military aid of the colonizing country to maintain control, so they make good puppets, and the resulting ethnic rivalries also channel people's anger away from capitalism, colonialism, or the state, and towards the ethnic scapegoat. Thus much of the ethnic bloodshed throughout Africa and Asia, from Nigeria to Rwanda to Indonesia, is a result of European colonizers lumping together distinct peoples and pitting them against one another for control of state power and scarce resources.

Just as the US government talks pragmatically about withdrawing gradually, once the Iraqis are "up to the task" of "maintaining security," Britain withdrew gradually to make sure the government they had created would be able to dominate its subjects and protect British interests.

The new government won formal independence in 1932, and survived for several decades. In 1958, at a time of global anti-colonial struggles and revolutions, a man named Qasim staged a popular coup against this neocolonial government, and began nationalizing Iraqi oil.

In the intervening years, Britain had been succeeded by its prot(c)g(c), the USA, as global imperial hegemon. World War II made it clear that Britain lacked the political and economic power to enforce consensus among the ruling Western nations. To an extent, Britain and the US had tolerated the Nazis in the hopes they would exterminate the larger threat posed by the Soviet Union. When the war ended with the USSR as a victorious major power, there was no remaining doubt that the US would have to be the world leader and inheritor of British imperialism, in its competition against the imperialism of Russia's state-capitalism. So when the Iraqis threw off the neocolonial government and nationalized the oil, it is no coincidence that the US lead the response, just as it is no mystery why it was the US that took over from the French colonizers being run out of Vietnam around that same time. In 1963, the CIA (under Richard Helms, who saved Nazi spymaster General Reinhard Gehlen from the Nuremburg gallows and recruited him into the CIA to aid the reorganization of the Agency) helped organize a successful assassination of Qasim and maneuver the Ba'ath party into power. At the time Saddam Hussein (who had been recruited for an earlier, failed assassination attempt) was head of the party's secret services and closely in contact with the CIA. He eventually rose to lead the Ba'athists, with additional US assistance. He remained a US ally and beneficiary of US aid and weapons, throughout the bloody war against Iran and throughout the atrocities for which he is now being prosecuted, until relations worsened after Israel bombed Iraq's nuclear facilities, and Saddam invaded Kuwait and endangered the oil supply (which is conveniently divided up among numerous neocolonial states, meaning no single client regime can control too much of the oil).

During the resulting Gulf War, the US bombing campaign targeted Iraq's health, water, and electricity infrastructure, disabling what had been a prosperous country, before imposing rigid sanctions to bring Iraq to its knees. The sanctions did not weaken Saddam, but they did kill 1.5 million Iraqis, including 500,000 children. Madeleine Albright, in

do. As mentioned, 28% of Marines admitted to shooting non-combatants. The racism and brutality of US troops has even drawn vocal criticisms from officers in the British military, itself guilty of torture in Iraq on a smaller scale.

UN

Occasionally liberals will still express the hope that the United Nations could take over the occupation of Iraq. This is absurd. The United Nations was the body to carry out the genocidal sanctions used against Iraq throughout the 90s, and the UN was complicit in the US invasion of Iraq, quitting the Kuwaiti border to allow the invading troops through. UN troops in countries throughout the world have been caught carrying out acts of rape, and setting up prostitution and slave trafficking rings exploiting impoverished locals. The UN took over the occupation of Haiti after a 2004 US-backed coup deposed the democratic government, and UN troops, under the leadership of socialist Brazil, were complicit in several massacres and other repressive acts in the rebellious slums of the capital. The UN is not a benevolent organization, it is the sum total of all the bureaucrats, politicians, government leaders, and jack-booted soldiers who comprise it.

Resistance

Iraqi Resistance

A secret British military poll conducted in August 2005, and a January 2006 poll by the University of Maryland found that about half of Iraqis admitted to approving of insurgent attacks against US, UK, and other occupying troops. 88% of Sunnis polled were in favor, and 41% of Shia. And the British poll, corroborating the findings of other polls, found that 82% of all Iraqis "strongly oppose" the presence of occupation troops. Iraqi resistance to US occupation is a popular movement. US media, and

in a striking symbol befitting an imperial army, every time a US soldier fires his rifle, in spirit a war crime is being committed.

US Troops

The US troops, as somewhat separate from the US government, deserve mention as an element of the occupation. Of course, US troops are not at all necessary for the wellbeing of Iraqis, and their mission is a lie and an oppression. Fewer than 1% of Iraqis, as surveyed by the British military, feel occupation troops are improving security in their country (as of August 2005). 67% of Iraqis believe civilians will be more secure if US troops leave within 6 months, 67% believe public services would increase, 65% believe crime would decrease (January 2006, University of Maryland).

US troops carrying out the occupation face a certain amount of abuse. For one, they have been subjected to the mind-numbing brutality of military life and shipped off for one lie (the justification for the war) within another (patriotism). And after killing large numbers of Iraqis, being jarred by sudden ambushes, driving over rotting bodies in the streets, and seeing a few friends injured or even killed, they are likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, possibly for the rest of their lives. Fewer US troops are being killed in this war, but a large part of that is because of the use of body armor. So, rather than aiming for a bulletproof torso, Iraqi insurgents aim for limbs, meaning that a large number of troops who in an earlier war would have been killed are coming home crippled. The number injured (requiring medical evacuation) is over 20,000. And the Bush administration has been especially cruel to the troops, keeping them past their enlistment, under-equipping them, and cutting services to veterans.

On the other hand, the US troops are abusive themselves. People who take trophy photos of disemboweled Iraqi boys they've just killed, or naked prisoners they are torturing, who trade pictures of gruesome deaths for pornography, are not innocent victims who have been duped into service. A good many Americans enlist because they want to be able to kill people of color in other countries, and they glorify what they

response to the death toll, said "We think the price is worth it." This would be a good time to reiterate that Democrats opposed to invading Iraq wanted to continue the sanctions.

Colonialism

The history of Iraq shows us that we cannot understand the current occupation without also understanding colonialism. Globalization began with the triangular trade of slavery, colonization, and industrialization. From its beginning it was clearly an economic enterprise. Columbus showed no modesty in articulating how important greed was as a motivating factor for him and his men, and the Spanish Crown sponsored him only because they were wagering they could profit off the trip. Thereafter, the colonies provided tremendous amounts of gold, silver, slaves and spices for their European "mother countries." In his book The Open Veins of Latin America, Eduardo Galeano calculates that the value of the gold and silver they took from South America alone is many times greater than the total size of the European economies, and well beyond their ability to ever repay. Later stages of colonialism were tailored to industrialism in Western Europe (and by that point the US as well). Colonies provided cheap natural resources — minerals, metals, wood, and new strategic resources like rubber and oil, as well as commodities like bananas and coffee that would transform the very cultures of the colonizer countries. In addition, colonies were a captive market for manufactures of the imperial country, especially textiles and tools. Colonized people were forced out of their prior forms of subsistence, especially where they had enjoyed self-sufficiency, and into wage labor or indebted servitude. The best lands were seized by white colonists, who often reduced the local population to plantation slavery. Any money the natives earned from new "jobs" went back to the colonizer country through taxes, fines, and the purchase of commodities they had once produced themselves but now had to buy.

But colonialism was about more than just economics. Ho Chi Minh documented how France experienced a net loss of money in colonizing Vietnam (though it was often French companies making the balance).

Colonialism was also related to state power. Holding colonies increased a state's global prominence, and furnished resources of military importance (rubber, oil, etc.). The European competition for superpower status throughout the 19th and 20th centuries was heavily wrapped up in competition for control of the colonies, and for world domination. Reductionist materialism leads many radicals to see state power as nothing more than a tool for guaranteeing access to material wealth, but it is just as appropriate to see wealth as a tool for guaranteeing access to power. Obviously, the ideal among the elite is to have both political power and wealth, but if we pit a person with a gun against a person with gold, we can see which is the surer path of obtaining that ideal. The pride and prestige Britain took from its global Empire, the sycophantic patriotism, also go far towards demonstrating the value of power in its own right, and the derivation of that power from colonialism.

There is a third aspect of colonialism that deserves mention: white supremacy. During the development of colonialism, various European nations created the white race (out of the concept of Christendom) to clarify relationships of colonization and enslavement, and to justify their pretensions of superiority. White supremacy is a tool for state power and economic exploitation, but it is also a creature of its own, that could survive in some form, if not directly challenged, long after its political and economic roots died off. In White Like Me, Tim Wise gives examples of how whites cling to racism even when it directly contradicts their economic interests. And the many foot soldiers of the imperialist nations, who did not directly derive economic benefits or political power from their governments' possession of the colonies, were gung ho in their role as colonial police, missionaries, and bureaucrats. Their covetousness and hatred of the colonized Other made it reward enough to repress, to indoctrinate, to dominate.

Neocolonialism

In the decades after World War II, most of the colonies won, or were given, formal independence, though we should not forget that even today a good many colonies remain, from Puerto Rico to Tahiti. As was the

the lead of conspiracy theorists and act like we know US involvement is certain just because a preponderance of doubts point in that direction; however it is important that we recognize that whether by windfall or by design the ethnic strife and possible civil war serve US government interests, so we can act accordingly.

Before moving on, it would be useful to cover some of the major methods of the US occupation. At this point, it has become clear that the guerrillas cannot be defeated military. Large parts of the country are off-limits to US troops (including parts of Baghdad) except during major offensives, and to reduce risk to ground troops the Pentagon is increasingly using air power for routine policing operations (killing more non-combatants as a result). The US is powerful enough to withstand attack and win any particular battle (there is unlikely to be an Iraqi Dien Bien Phu or Tet Offensive any time soon), but mounting costs and an inability to establish lasting control over any ground that is not directly occupied corner the US in a strategic dead end. So, psychological operations become more important. This means media control — attacking independent journalists and saturating the market with Arabic-language media created and controlled by the US government. Beyond propaganda, Iraqis thought to be adamantly opposed to occupation need to brutalized into submission. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International each found that US troops "routinely" tortured and raped Iraqi prisoners at facilities throughout Iraq (January 2005). War crimes, being expedient, become routine. The US military has killed approximately 130,000 Iraqis so far. In cities under siege, the US military has executed wounded prisoners, bombed hospitals, and carried out "collective punishment" against the entire civilian population. We should note an interesting characteristic of the US military. The standard-issue rifle for US troops is the M-16, which fires a high velocity light-weight ammunition specifically designed to tumble upon impact, so that it tears up the flesh, and creates wicked internal wounds that are intentionally difficult to treat and heal, meaning the victim is much more likely to die after the battle from blood loss or infection. The ammunition was designed with the purpose of circumventing international law banning dum-dum bullets, but still accomplishing the same result for which dum-dums were illegalized. Thus,

regarding special US-controlled units like the Wolf Brigades operating as death squads, or reports that the people turning up with bullets in their heads (whose deaths were tacitly blamed on the insurgency) were actually last seen after US troops busted down their doors and hustled them off. Before these stories could get much coverage in the US, the new story arose, spectacularly punctuated by several confrontations between rogue Shias and American troops, including a US liberation of a secret torture prison allegedly operated by the Interior Ministry. Whether these were legitimate conflicts to restore unity and professionalism in the Iraqi government, or carefully stage-managed ploys to distance the US from the death squads and portray them as liberators, it is unlikely that with all its clandestine agents operating in Iraq the US does not have its hands in a good part of the killings.

On February 22, 2006, unknown parties blew up the centuries-old Askariya mosque in Samarrah, one of the holiest Shia shrines. A number of Iraqis alleged government or US complicity (including a government minister and a major political party, as well as numerous protestors), as there had been several warnings that the mosque would be targeted, and they were ignored. Immediately (far quicker than they acknowledged any other rough spot in the occupation), US media jumped on the "civil war" story and trumpeted every possible news of killings of Sunnis or Shias, though it is unclear whether there really were a major increase in killings or if the media were just starting to report deaths they had previously ignored. In any case, a number of the most provocative revenge attacks in the weeks after the bombings bore the marks of professional mass abduction/executions (large numbers of victims, bound or handcuffed, killed execution-style all at once, i.e. not the work of an untrained mob). US leaders used the specter of civil war as an excuse to justify prolonged US presence. Regardless of who was responsible, the Askariya bombing proved useful to the US government, and the American public was prepped for several weeks with the threat of civil war in Iraq, before Bush's announcement that troop withdrawal would not occur during his presidency.

It is important to raise the possibility of US involvement in attacks on civilians and ethnic bloodshed, though the nature of the conflict means we will not know all of the facts for years to come. We should not follow

case with Iraq, this transition did not grant real freedom or autonomy to the former colonies. Just as Frantz Fanon warned to the national liberationists of Africa who adopted the political party as the organizational form for their rebellion, they became neocolonies, practicing Western forms of government (which are specifically crafted to be manipulated and controlled by an elite, whether domestic or foreign), and constrained within a global capitalist economy.

The neocolonies still provide natural resources and raw materials, while a new class of "developed" neocolonies contains major manufacturing centers, as well as a large upper crust of consumers. The former mother countries of the "First World" make up the bulk of the consumers of the world's resources; the nerve center of information technology, management, and technocracy; and the global police force. Free trade regimes allow multinational corporations to dominate neocolonial economies while under-priced grains from the US undermine localized peasant agriculture and create total dependency on wage labor and the global economy. MTV and Coca-Colonization (the destruction of native cultures through the saturation of local markets with Western imports and the accompanying lifestyles, supplemented by reified concepts of intellectual property that assist the commodification of culture) supplement Christian missionaries (who are still prevalent in many parts of the world) in carrying out cultural imperialism.

Challenging any of these rules of neocolonialism by the "independent" countries will result in the same repression and brutality that upheld colonialism. One difference is that murder by sanctions or divestment (withdrawal of the global economic arteries on which all countries must be dependent) is preferable to murder by bomb and bullet, because of the logistical bother of deploying troops to a country not under direct colonial occupation. However, a look at either recent history or a map showing the location of all US military bases around the world (in easy striking distance of any spot on earth) shows that old-fashioned military intervention is still very much a part of the global order. Of course, the elevation of domestic elites to the seat of government in the neocolonies makes their interests similar to the interests of the governments and corporations of the Global North, so they are much less likely to rebel (most covert/military interventions against neocolonies in recent years

have been less for any anti-capitalist rebelliousness than for a reluctance to tow the specific line put forward by US state planners). More often, it is neocolonial populations who rebel, and their governments who repress them, with military aid from the US and Europe.

As with colonialism, neocolonialism contains the aforementioned economic roots. Authoritarian dissidents and white dissidents are loathe to acknowledge the other two motivators of neocolonialism, preferring to reduce everything to simple economics. Though neocolonialism blurs some of the traditional boundaries of nation-states, the process is still very much wrapped up in state power. Some socialists, whose programs for the future include political parties and states, equate globalization with the death of the nation-state (examples of this can be found in the popular documentary, The Fourth World War). Perhaps they wish to obscure their total failures, in China and Russia, of safeguarding revolution with a "revolutionary government." So, to justify their love-affair with government and political parties, they attempt to confuse people by associating the neoliberal attack on their dignity, health, autonomy, and livelihood with some attack against the nation-state they happen to inhabit.

But old-school colonialism also challenged traditional conceptions of nation-states, turning Algerians into French people, for one, but in the end that process only strengthened the state. Likewise, states today cater to an internationalist bourgeoisie by reducing protectionism, but the resulting economic expansion has aided an unprecedented growth of state power. The perfection of thought-control implicit in the culture industry, the implementation of the surveillance state and prison-industrial complex, and the militarization of borders have all been components of globalization. We could also cite the example of the Asian and European banks and governments that own the US debt, losing money on low interest loans. In terms of economics alone, this investment does not make sense. The key is that these loans are subsidizing US military expenditures, because the US is the only government with the ability to project itself militarily on a global scale, protecting investments and safeguarding the foundations of capitalism. Thus, world capitalists are willing to lose some money in order to prop up the leading state power

Either by forming a phony resistance group from scratch and recruiting unknowing dupes, or infiltrating and taking over an existing resistance group, the occupier acquires a hugely important tool for discrediting or manipulating the resistance movement as a whole. (Recently, the Afghan government accused the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISS, which is closely linked with CIA, of taking over rebel groups and recruiting suicide bombers to carry out attacks in Afghanistan). The French perfected this practice in their war against Algeria (the lessons from which serve as a textbook for counterinsurgency in military schools across the Global North, including in the United States). And though it was denied at the time we have since learned that the US military intentionally used this tactic in Vietnam, where the CIA bombed civilians in Saigon and blamed it on the Vietcong. There is certainly no reason to believe that the US has become more humane since that war.

The Iraqis do not believe such an absurd contention either. 61% believe inter-ethnic violence will decrease if the US leaves (according to a January 2006, University of Maryland poll). Numerous Iraqis have speculated the US is behind bombings targeting civilians; frequently after such bombings, the gathered crowds throw rocks at US troops who arrive to "restore order," and at many protests Iraqis hold signs suggesting the US is behind the terrorism, but all this is whited out from US media accounts. After the first US invasion of Fallujah, in April 2004, the occupiers were forced to retreat after Shias, especially the Al Sadr militia, rose up in support of the Sunni rebels in Fallujah and opened a second front in the south. After that debacle, US commanders went on record stating the need to divide the insurgency. They did not disclose what tactics they intended, but we can imagine they were aiming for more than harsh words and bad blood. And in 2005, in Madain (outside Baghdad), US forces justified a major military operation on the basis of fabricated reports that Sunni rebels had seized dozens of Shia hostages and would execute them unless all Shias left the area. Even Iraqi government officials charged that it was a ploy to create sectarian strife. And there is also the question of rogue Shia-controlled Interior Ministry units going rampant, abducting and killing people for their own political ends. Before the US media started emphasizing this line, a number of stories were beginning to break in independent and foreign presses

have another opportunity to portray itself as a savior of the Iraqi people by destroying terrorist cells (and simultaneously blurring the distinction between terrorist groups and the bulk of the resistance). And as long as the security situation in Iraq is unstable, the Iraqi government will have to rely on US support and a minimum level of cooperation and obedience.

There are two factors that can allow resistance groups to survive occupation by a militarily superior force. One is popular support. The other is the CIA — that is to say, clandestine agencies of the occupation itself. Numerous points of consideration force us to examine whether the US government is partially or fully behind attacks on US civilians and the development towards civil war in Iraq. First of all, 95% of Iraqis disapprove strongly of attacks on Iraqi civilians (according to a January 2006 poll). Guerrillas cannot survive without popular support. How is it, then, that several resistance groups are able to carry out bombings on mosques and in crowded market places, without becoming isolated, exposed, and crushed? We should note that the major resistance groups in Iraq have publicly come out against killing civilians (a few making exception for those who work for the occupation directly). One of the only groups to claim responsibility for ethnic attacks or attacks against civilians is Al Qaida in Iraq. In April 2006, the Pentagon admitted to waging a "psyops" campaign to exaggerate the role of Al Qaida in Iraq and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the group's Jordanian leader. They also acknowledged playing on Iraqi distrust of foreigners, and bragged that the campaign had resulted in fighting between Iraqi insurgents and foreign fighters (Washington Post, 4-10-2006). Two months later, at an image low-point after the revelation of the massacres of dozens of civilians at Haditha by the Marine Corps, the US killed Zarqawi, and a straw man the Pentagon had created to one extent or another was laid low. The competency of the armed forces was reestablished, and the US got some good press for a small act of community service in Iraq.

In the aftermath of the operation, the Pentagon acknowledged receiving intelligence from inside Al Qaida in Iraq. The question remains as to the extent of the relationship between the two organizations. Skeptical readers should be informed that a stock tactic of counterinsurgency warfare is for the occupier to create or co-opt their own resistance groups.

that tops the global pyramid. States are not becoming obsolete, only more integrated. Neocolonialism is dependent on state power.

It is also dependent on white supremacy (though again a more integrationist variety thereof). As long as white culture is understood to be universally superior, the most successful elements in the neocolonies will try to go to Harvard to become economists, will accept the teachings of the World Bank, will adopt the priority of "development" as their own path to salvation. They will be less likely to rebel, to trust that their native cultures and their own peoples hold the answers that will extricate them from the miserable conditions that plague the neocolonies. In this version of white supremacy, people of color from the Global South are allowed, to a certain extent, to become white, because white people will be the primary beneficiaries of this more efficient and profitable system, and because the mechanics of hegemony must negotiate the simultaneous conversion and exclusion of the dominated Other.

Neocolonialism is easily visible in Iraq. The "Coalition Provisional Authority" under Paul Bremer authored dozens of rules that the Iraqi government would not be allowed to change, including major neoliberal overhauls of financing and economy, and laws protecting intellectual property. Meanwhile, war architect Paul Wolfowitz went on to head the World Bank (to which the Iraqi government has already been shackled with significant debt). After being bombed flat by the US, Iraq has to pay for much of its reconstruction through oil revenues, preserving its role as a supplier of strategic natural resources. Meanwhile, the US and its closest allies have cemented their monopolized access to Iraqi oil. Neocolonialism in Iraq, like colonialism elsewhere, has been used by the imperial government to lose money to the benefit of its corporations. About half of the $19 billion allocated by the US government for reconstruction could not be accounted for and appears to have been pocketed. Much of the rest went as high-profit contracts to US corporations. Iraqis themselves have certainly noticed the neocolonial economics of the occupation. On January 1, 2006, Iraqis in Kirkuk protested poor living conditions and a sharp rise in fuel prices caused in part by the IMF. US troops opened fire on the demonstrators, killing four.

The US crisis of maintaining control in Iraq brings us to the topic of state power. From a purely economic point of view, the invasion of Iraq

was not a justifiable endeavor. In many ways it was an exercise in state power. The neoconservative hawks in the Bush administration certainly had an interest in testing whether the Vietnam Syndrome (which constrained US military options for years) was fully laid to rest. Iraq's oil reserves certainly provided an important consideration, for reasons of military strategy as much as economics, but Iraq was targeted first and foremost as part of the "Axis of Evil," one of only half a dozen "rogue states," out of a world of nearly two hundred states, that were not sufficiently aligned with US interests. The US invasion of Iraq ties directly into the project for increased political domination of the Middle East, and the related missions against Syria, Iran, and Lebanon (the "Cedar Revolution" being a successful example of a newly developed regime change "template").

Finally, the neocolonial project in Iraq cannot be divorced from white supremacy. White supremacy is a major glue in the brotherhood of the military, and an important palliative in allowing US troops to kill large numbers of Arabs. We should note that compared to the Vietnam War, when the US military became dysfunctionally mutinous, the armed forces today contain a much smaller disproportion of people of color (despite great disparities in wealth). In other words, the Pentagon previously targeted people of color for recruitment as cannon fodder, but today they may be aiming for a more obedient, whiter military. While people of color are still disproportionately represented in the military, the disproportion is smaller and may simply be the result of economic disparities. Furthermore, the US invasion of Iraq could not have been justified without the implicit prejudice that "those people" cannot take care of themselves. The US sabotaged the Shia uprising after the first Gulf War, and previously betrayed rebellious Iraqi Kurds to deliberately prevent any example of self-liberating, self-organizing people of color (in response to the betrayal and resulting massacre of the Kurds, Kissinger responded that you shouldn't confuse covert action with missionary work).

certainly captured more popular support than other parties). Elections that have some semblance of fairness are necessary to prevent a national resistance (by which I mean an insurgency generalized and to some extent unified among all Iraqis) which would handily defeat the occupiers. The Shias, on the other hand, need to be kept in check with a series of parliamentary balances. The Kurds provide one, with the US holding quite a few bargaining chips over their fate as a people. Another comes from secular Shia parties, whose otherwise meager influence the US can bolster with patronage, friendly propaganda in the new Iraqi media (created by the Pentagon), and most likely vote rigging as well. Sunni parties that do not boycott the elections can also pressure the Shia majority away from alliance with Iran. US support (most likely clandestine) could be a welcome resource to any minority party willing to play ball. Such betrayal and opportunistic collaborating with greater powers is in the nature of political parties, which is why departing colonizers almost always leave their freed subjects in the hands of a parliamentary system.

There are also critical extra-parliamentary checks, notably in the manipulation of the resistance. By attacking civilians, killing Shia worshippers on their way to prayer or blowing up mosques, the small number of insurgent groups that could fairly be called "terrorist" are helping the US achieve its second choice in occupation (a country divided against itself). When the occupier is not the only one intentionally killing civilians, the resistance gets a bad name, and all the bloodshed and terror causes many Iraqis to prioritize security over liberation. In such circumstances, security ostensibly can only be provided by a powerful force, i.e. the US or its fully funded favorite. When Shias are especially targeted with a violence they thought they were free from since the fall of Saddam, Shia militias or government agencies supposedly controlled by Shias strike back killing Sunnis, or ethnically cleansing neighborhoods. This provides the US with several opportunities. Their secular puppets gain credibility; Sunnis opposed to terrorism may be influenced to support legal political parties to avoid more feuding; Iraqis sickened by the civil warfare and typically disinclined from divisive chauvinisms (one Iraqi I spoke to said that before the war, few people in the cities knew whether their neighbors were Sunni, Shia, or Christian) may want the intervention of an outside mediator (which would be chosen by the US); and the US would

identifying level where it is harder to control from afar, running contrary to the forced integration of globalization. But the secular expatriates favored by the US to rule Iraq (a class of "new Iraqis" following a corporate model, looking west, and wearing business attire) were totally out of touch with the country, failed to win support, and encouraged the contention that the Iraqi government was a US puppet (thus fueling an insurgency that united Sunni and Shia). So the alternative was to allow Iraqis to self-identify (rather than crafting a new Iraqi), but to use those identities to drive wedges through the country, that the occupiers could potentially exploit. The first choice of any occupier is a country unified behind its puppets. When that fails, the second choice is a country divided against itself — anything to avoid a country unified against the occupier.

The logic of occupation requires civil war in Iraq, to avoid a war of liberation. The Sunnis have been too adamantly opposed to the occupation to place in power, and they lack trust country-wide because of their complicity with Hussein. The Kurds are too small a minority, and worse would destabilize the region by supporting Kurds oppressed by US-allied Turkey, inevitably leading to conflict with the US itself. The remaining option to allow ascendancy into government are the Shia, who enjoy the added benefit of being the majority (thus the occupiers get points for introducing "democracy"). Allowing the Shia to control the puppet government is problematic, because they will not be entirely dependent on the imperial power (recall that dependency is a characteristic of colonialism and neocolonialism). This is because, as circumstances have it, Iraq is located right next to one of the few remaining non-aligned, and in fact anti-US, countries in the world: Iran. Furthermore, Iran is powerful enough to sponsor a government in Iraq, and it is also a majority Shia country with an Islamic government.

Thus, giving power to the Shia puts the US on a tricky path, because the puppet can become disobedient and transfer its allegiance to Iran, directly contradicting every single strategic interest the US has at stake (even the oil, though it would keep flowing, might go to Chinese or other markets instead of to the US). So the key, and we can see this clearly in the news, is to take a path of tension and contradiction. Islamic Shia parties can be allowed to win a majority in the government (they have

Occupation

The Media

When discussing the various component elements of the occupation of Iraq, we should be very forthright that the US media are a part of the occupation, playing a very important role. For the preparation and first year of the invasion, the US mass media functioned almost exclusively as the psychological operations (psyops) wing of the Pentagon. Since victory proved to be fleeting, the media have remembered their liberalism and re-expanded to include all elite voices (including "anti-war" voices), so that they may serve in their typical function of providing discourse around strategies of state domination and capitalist expansion, and indoctrinating the public to accept the assumptions and consequences that accompany those strategies. This includes strategies for pulling out of Iraq, on the strict rationale that this would be best for US interests, and the occasional admission that the Pentagon's lofty intentions are not coming across to Iraqis, and they actually want us the hell out of their country.

A 2004 survey by the Program on International Policy found that large percentages of Americans believed false government propaganda justifying the war. 57% believed Iraq was providing substantial support to Al Qaida, which was false; 60% believed that Iraq had WMDs or a major program for developing them, also false; 82% believed that experts either agreed that Iraq had WMDs or were evenly divided on the question, when in fact experts not in the employ of the US government (and some who were) were nearly unanimous in their rejection of WMD claims. The more people got their news from the TV, the more misinformed they were, with FOX viewers being the most misinformed, but PBS still turning out a substantial percentage who believed government propaganda (note that PBS took a hypocritical, liberal "both sides" approach, treating blatantly false propaganda and fact-based contradictions to the government line as equally valid).

Though television was the worst, or should we say the most effective form of thought-control, US newspapers were also complicit in the propaganda. Most were content to publish unadulterated government press releases as objective news, but some got more creative. Judith Miller wrote several influential front page stories in the New York Times, the paper of record, based entirely on fabricated evidence from government sources, including elaborate and drawn-out narratives in which "Iraqi government defectors" (actually CIA assets) secretively indicated hidden WMD sites.

Now would be a good time to point out that we fail to do the American public justice by putting too much of the blame for the manipulation on the media. To a large extent, people believe what they want to believe. No one in this country has any excuse for believing anything the government says. If a government official ever says anything closely resembling the truth, it is only the coincidence that in this one case, the facts happen to line up with policy objectives. Even as the majority were staunchly insisting that the government would not intentionally fabricate the justifications for going to war, the National Archives were releasing the final confirmation that, yes, the Gulf of Tonkin incident, used as a pretext for escalation in Vietnam, was a hoax. No doubt, the majority at the time insisted that such allegations were lunatic conspiracy theories. Months before the invasion of Iraq even began, all my friends and I, in fact every anarchist I knew, were well aware that the major pieces of evidence justifying the attack were faulty, or even fabricated. This is not because we are particularly gifted people, but because the information was out there, and we knew not to trust the government or corporate media. (Our theory on the propaganda role of corporate media also allowed us to predict the coup in Haiti before it happened). However, many Americans enjoy being citizens of the Empire, and their naïve belief in the war rationale had less to do with a perception of facts than with a desire to stand united.

Nonetheless, media thought-control plays a major role in making dissent seem baseless, and making imperialism seem necessary and desirable. After laying the groundwork for invasion, the media have persisted in their role, cultivating support for the US military, sanitizing the war, and covering up the majority of abuses. Those abuses they do not cover

US and Kurdish interests conflict, as US interests do now with Sunni and Shia Arabs in Iraq. The Iraqi government poses the possibilities of re-domination of the Kurds, or of co-opting Kurdish liberation struggles for a small piece of government power in one of the states that divide them.

US Government

The US government, of course, is the principal occupier of Iraq. The US has a number of objectives, including achieving propaganda victories in its War on Terror, for example by exaggerating the significance of al-Qaida groups in Iraq beyond all proportion to reality, and then defeating those groups or killing influential figures within them (e.g. Zarqawi), while also deemphasizing the redundancy of this victory (al-Qaida owing its existence in Iraq entirely to the Terror War itself).

The primary objective of the US is to install a competent government in Iraq that conforms to US strategic interests: which are to keep the oil flowing (and favor US investors and markets), deregulate and join a Middle East "free trade" bloc, discourage the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, and join the chorus of puppet states that are especially obsequious to the United States. Objections from US Democrats to the botched occupation stem from the fact that Hussein-era Iraq did a better job of upholding these interests. Genocidal sanctions held Iraq hostage for its oil, and though Iraq could not directly join the neoliberal tide the sanctions prevented the country from developing an independent economy. Hussein was also effective at repressing Islamic fundamentalism, and though he was staunchly outside of the pro-US camp, given his abysmal world stature such opposition counted for some political capital.

The US is having a hard time meeting its objective. A colonial creation like Iraq can only be kept together with a brutally powerful centralizing force. The US, like any imperial overseer, is opposed to self-organization by the colonized. Even granting any political autonomy (e.g. to the Kurds, or to Anbar) to diffuse the tensions caused by amalgamation is risky, because it decentralizes a certain quantity of power to a local, self-

to a command center on a US military base. Also, major parts of key provinces expected to vote against the Constitution were depopulated by US military assaults just prior to the referendum. US raids and bombing attacks created tens of thousands of refugees in Sunni areas in the lead-up to the vote. It is against international law for elections to be held under military occupation, and it certainly violates any standard of decency for the military force conducting the elections to wage a simultaneous war against the least obedient parts of the electorate it is liberating. The Association of Muslim Scholars, the most influential Sunni group, said of the new Iraqi Constitution, "The whole project was American." Transitional Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari was sympathetic to Iran, according to the US government (he also opposed the 2003 invasion and had the support of Muqtada al-Sadr, and his favorite current author is reportedly Noam Chomsky), but he was pushed out by pressure from Kurdish and Sunni politicians, as well as substantial pressure from the US, and succeeded by Nouri Kamel al-Maliki, who worked with the US-backed Iraqi National Congress during the 90s. The US ambassador to Iraq described the appointment of al-Maliki as a victory for the US, and called Maliki and other Iraqi leaders "independent of Iran" (Washington Post, 4-26-2006), or in other words, dependent on the US. Shia leaders previously seen as aligned with Iran, such as Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, have proven susceptible to US pressure.

The Iraqis themselves understand that their government is hardly sovereign. 76% believe the US would refuse to leave if asked by the Iraqi government, according to a January 2006 poll conducted by the University of Maryland. And in fact the US has direct control of the Iraqi military and intelligence service.

The Kurds, the least insurgent of the three major populations in Iraq, are most interested in using a veto power in the new government to win independence from the colonial contrivance that is Iraq. A good many Kurds, victims of genocide at the hands of Iraq and Turkey, first and foremost want a country of their own. Pragmatic Kurdish leaders recognize that in a volatile Iraq they can bargain for partial autonomy thanks to the situation created by the US invasion; but we must not forget that the US government opposes independence for the Kurds, and militarily supports Turkey, their worst oppressor. In the long run,

up follow a similar pattern. Firstly, the US media always jump in to provide damage control. Americans unfamiliar with independent or foreign media may think CNN and the New York Times cover certain abuses of the occupation voluntarily. But from the torture at Abu Ghraib to the massacres at Haditha, the US media did not speak up until the story had already broken and the rest of the world was in an uproar. Secondly, the US media adopt a posture of fairness to present "both sides of the story," neither of which they are likely to attempt to prove or disprove. For example, they may interview a Pentagon spokesperson, and then someone from Amnesty International, about the torture at Abu Ghraib. Amidst the two opposing viewpoints, loyal Americans can find plenty of room to believe the Pentagon denials, which our hard-hitting journalists rarely demonstrate to be a bunch of bullshit. Thirdly, the US media do their best to scandalize the issue. They sensationally focus on one or two images when in reality a myriad of details exist. These images (say, using dogs to frighten Abu Ghraib inmates, or putting them naked on a dog leash) they repeat ad nauseum until they come to signify the event in its entirety. We can only fully understand the sadism and torture of US Terror prisons by considering the full arsenal of tactics developed to hurt, frighten, degrade, and insult prisoners in Iraq and elsewhere. But when the average American hears over and over again about troops turning dogs on prisoners at one solitary prison, with one or two pictures that do not even show any biting, it becomes a scandal, a singular faux pas, and the reaction encouraged from us is somewhere along the lines of: "Christ, quit whining, it's just some dogs!" Additionally, US media coverage of abuses shows a tree to hide a forest. The US occupation by its very nature is abusive, but this is heresy and thought crime. All dissent within democratic states must be geared towards state interests, so an occupation by the state can be criticized and fine-tuned, but not opposed at its foundations. US media are not allowed to encourage the American public to think rebelliously, so they reveal a single act of abuse to obscure the daily routine from which it comes. After the "Abu Ghraib scandal," most of the American public believed that some acts of abuse, maybe even torture, occurred at Abu Ghraib and perhaps also Guantanamo Bay. But the well documented fact of the matter is that torture and abuse occur at every detention facility run by the US military in Iraq,

Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and elsewhere, as a matter of course, arising out of the racist and sadistic cruelty of the guards, the systemic drive to "produce intelligence" endemic throughout the CIA and Special Forces, and intentional policy decisions coming from the very top. After the scandal of the massacres in Haditha plays out (unless conditions force the press to acknowledge more massacres), most Americans will be convinced that those few dozen civilians were some of the first and only killed in such a manner by US troops, when in reality that sort of thing seems to happen every other week (to refer to the Signalfire news briefs, on March 15, 2006, US troops executed 11 civilians just outside of Baghdad, according to Iraqi police reports, and on March 26 US forces stormed into a mosque and killed 22 unarmed people). From eyewitness accounts, blogs run by Iraqis in Baghdad, and even the admissions of some troops, it seems that US troops at checkpoints machine-gun "suspicious" cars full of unarmed Iraqis on a daily basis. Already by the end of 2004, 28% of Marines admitted to killing noncombatants (according to a New England Journal of Medicine poll cited in the February 2005 issue of Z Magazine); and of course even more non-combatants are killed by air attacks. With repetitive coverage of a few exemplary incidents, the media can ignore the daily routine of murder that characterizes the occupation. Finally, corporate media coverage of abuses is self-serving. Despite all its faults, it provides an alibi, presenting the misimpression that the corporate media are adversarial, hard-hitting, investigative, concerned about human rights, anything other than the elite lapdogs they are. What sticks out in the minds of most people who do not critically analyze media coverage is that they do indeed publicize US abuses, so it becomes nearly impossible to convince people of their governmental role. In this way, corporate media is a much more effective propaganda system than a more totalitarian variety that completely whites out any abuses.

After the Holocaust, one of the people executed at Nuremburg was Julius Streicher. Streicher was a media mogul. Though Streicher was not a member of the government and thus not directly involved in the mass murder, he was, his executioners decided, directly responsible for the genocide because he used his control over the mass media to encourage popular support for Nazi bigotries and state policies. In the present

day, if justice were served impartially using the (US-authored) principles from Nuremburg, then Rupert Murdoch, Judith Miller, Dan Rather, and countless others would all be swinging from the end of a rope.

Iraqi Government

In line with the patterns of neocolonialism, the Iraqi government itself is a tool of the occupation. Due to corporate media distortions, it is hard to tell how much control the US government has over its puppet state. If the Pentagon, CIA, and State Department have all played their cards well, then in reality the occupation government is doing just what its handlers want, and the apparent disunity and mixed loyalties are a mask for the widespread violence (abductions and extrajudicial killings). Thus the mass murder that always accompanies counterinsurgency warfare can conveniently be blamed on the insurgents themselves, on agents of Iran, on a disobedient Interior Ministry, while the US comes off as a beleaguered but well meaning would-be savior. On the other hand, if the Bush administration has been so unbelievably incompetent to have lost control of even the Interior Ministry, then different factions are using the tool created by the US for their own ends, sometimes in minor contradiction of US interests. At either extreme, the US government has exercised fundamental influence over the Iraqi government, and has created a puppet state at odds, and in conflict, with the insurgency, and the Iraqi people themselves.

The first Iraqi government, appointed by the US Occupation, was headed by a CIA asset and British citizen, Iyad Allawi, who helped feed Western intelligence agencies false WMD claims in the run-up to invasion. Despite having had control of the government and backing of the massive Pentagon media infrastructure in Iraq, Allawi won little support from Iraqis. But he did govern during a crucial time period, when the new Iraqi government was being crafted. The referendum to vote on the new Constitution, on October 15, 2005, was marred by voting irregularities and the absence of international observers. "Most provinces" had an "unusually high" number of ballots and other evidence of vote stuffing (Associated Press 10-17-2005). Election results were reported