

Iraq: Illusion and reality

By Bill Bowles

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The Western media made a great play of the 'sovereignty' that Iraq allegedly achieved a little over a month ago when CIA/MI5 'asset' Allawi was installed 'Diem-style' by his US paymasters. And indeed, ever since then, the media in direct collusion with the state has tried to foist on an extremely sceptical public the illusion of a 'benign occupier', the USUK, backing the new 'sovereign' state of Iraq. Press coverage, almost without exception plays down the role of the occupation forces, by creating the illusion of the existence of an Iraqi army, when in the months preceding 'sovereignty' the constant cry was that was no Iraqi army to takeover the role of the occupiers once the 'handover' was achieved.

Charting the press coverage over this period reveals the confidence trick that's been played on us. So an Independent article (10/8/04) has a front-page headline "Iraq on a knife edge". This is how the Independent presents the situation, "Almost 4,000 US and Iraqi forces confronted about 2,000 militiamen dug in around the holy sites in the heart of Najaf"

What we're not told is how many of the 4,000 are occupation forces. But later, the same piece tells us that according to a "...senior [US] military official...about 2,000 US Marines, supported by US Calvary [sic] units and 1,800 Iraqi National Guards (ING) and police were now massed at the city."

One assumes the two numbers refer to the same forces. However, as Iraqi forces are equipped only with small arms (the occupiers won't trust them with anything more lethal as desertions are legend), it's obvious that the bulk of the fighting will be conducted by the US and then mostly from the air. Quite clearly, the Iraqi 'army' plays no more than a PR role.

Reference to the 'knife edge' in the headline is nowhere to be found except insofar as the general impression is that of a country in revolt even if the resisters are still described as "gunmen" and the occupiers as "forces" throughout the article. So what does the term 'knife edge' refer to? Without actually stating it, the Independent's piece reveals a national uprising, hardly the kind of event that is conducted by "gunmen". So why does the Independent find it impossible to say so?

However, reports of the fierce resistance to the occupation are available if one cares to

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look, except you won't find them in the Independent. So for example, the capture of a US General still remains to be reported anywhere in the Western media. In the Iraqi Resistance Report for events of Monday, 2 August 2004 through Wednesday, 4 August 2004 Translated and/or compiled by Muhammad Abu Nasr, member editorial board The Free Arab Voice, we read, "The correspondent of Mafkarat al-Islam wrote... that Resistance forces launched a painful attack at the US aggressor troops in which they captured an American General on Tuesday morning. The General was accompanying a US column heading from a US outpost to the command headquarters, set up by the Americans in the Republican Palace in ar-Ramadi.

"The capture of the American general sparked the fighting, as US forces moved to close all roads to and from ar-Ramadi to prevent his being taken outside the city area. US forces are insisting that they will not open the roads until the Resistance hands the general back to them.

"One large column of US forces attempted to get to ar-Ramadi along the expressway north of al-Fallujah, but Resistance fighters from that city confronted the advancing Americans, unleashing a hail of rockets and mortars upon them, splitting the column in two. The rear half of the column fled back to Baghdad, the front part attempted to make for ar-Ramadi, but, failing that, made their way to the US occupation base at al-Habbaniyah instead."

The 'coalition' run the real risk of finding themselves trapped in Iraq, confined to their military strongholds, venturing out only by air and in heavily armoured sorties, much like the Israelis in occupied Palestine or the US in Vietnam, retreating when confronted with an enemy that strikes then melts back into the narrow streets of the cities. The contemporary histories of Vietnam and Algeria seem to have escaped the notice of the press pundits just as much as it's escaped the notice of the occupiers, who talk glibly of "gunmen" or "fanatical Shia".

What are also noticeable by their absence are reports from 'embedded' journalists, hence press coverage of the destruction currently taking place in cities like Najaf are virtually non-existent. Instead, journalists are relying almost totally on US military propaganda reports.

Now read this:

"Resistance pummels American base in at-Taji; US airlift of casualties lasts over five hours.

"Iraqi Resistance fighters at 7:45am on Tuesday morning [Aug 3] fired six massive Grad rockets at the US aggressor base in at-Taji, northwest of Baghdad. The rockets slammed into the camp, and one of them scored a direct hit on the

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main ammunition storehouse, setting off a series of massive and continuous explosions.

“With the road cut by Resistance activity, the Americans used huge Chinook helicopters to evacuate the dead and wounded after the explosions died down at 8:30am. The movement of the huge helicopters evacuating casualties continued until 2:00pm in the afternoon, according to the local correspondent of Mafkarat al-Islam.”

Search for that and other comparable stories in the corporate press in vain! That the power to resist can be a national aspiration is unknown to these smug and comfortable professionals, who from the comfort of the Green Zone, write of events in Iraq without actually being there, recalling the days of the Sandinista struggles in Nicaragua, when the reporters for NYT and other corporate media wrote most of their stories in the bar of the Intercontinental Hotel using the press handouts from the US embassy to ‘inform’ them of what was going on in the rain forests and villages outside Managua.

Caution: Imperial Mindset at Work

Elsewhere in the Independent, an ‘op-ed’ piece by Patrick Cockburn paints a picture that at first sight is in direct contradiction to the one portrayed by the ‘news’ item in the Independent referred to above. Titled “If the Chalabis were corrupt, they were not alone”, itself a bit of a misnomer given that Ahmed Chalabi is a convicted felon in absentia for ripping off one of Jordan’s major banks to the tune of some \$70 million, but we’ll forgive Cockburn’s slip for the piece shows that Iraq is ‘ruled’ by a corrupt gang of thieves hand-picked by the ‘coalition’ who, judging by the latest events, are enraging the Iraqi populace even more than the occupiers have, if that’s possible.

The Chalabis were handpicked by the US government to do their dirty work for them, from supplying the US with fabricated evidence that would justify the invasion, through to arming Ahmed Chalabi and airlifting in his private army within hours of the fall of Saddam’s regime, even down to equipping his thugs with weapons, uniforms and insignia. That they backed a loser is merely yet another nail in the coffin of Bush’s Middle East ‘strategy’.

The fact that the US now deems it expedient to dump the Chalabis merely reinforces the utterly corrupt nature of the US government, never mind their puppets in Baghdad, who are in any case, carbon copies of virtually every other puppet regime the US have established in countries around the world over the past century of imperial ‘adventures’. Cockburn’s piece tries put a positive spin on the situation (admittedly an almost impossible task) when it refers to, “The charges against the Chalabis show the difficulty the US is

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having in producing a coherent policy in Iraq.”

But how on earth does Cockburn connect the charges against the Chalabis with the difficulty the US is having in coming up with a coherent policy? Unfortunately, the article doesn't tell us. As ever, the Western intelligentsia have no trouble labelling those damn Arabs as corrupt, indeed it's assumed as a foregone conclusion by the writer, but Americans corrupt? No, instead the US is having trouble with coming up with a policy that justifies putting a gang of crooks 'in charge'. Worse still, Cockburn avoids the fact that the US is not even bothering to justify its puppets. Instead, it continues to put out the propaganda that "things are getting better".

Cockburn's piece shifts the entire burden of responsibility from the occupiers to their puppets. So we read that the Chalabi affair is "farcical" and down to "bureaucratic warfare in Washington". And whilst admitting that the "occupation regime was riddled with corruption from the moment it was established", the fact that was installed by the US in the first place simply doesn't figure in Cockburn's simplistic and incorrect 'analysis'.

It seems that the press pundits just can't bring themselves to admit to the obvious even when everything points to the fact that the issue is not down to the US producing a "coherent policy", for obviously the only coherent policy would be to leave Iraq immediately.

One is tempted to conclude that this kind of coverage is down to a bad case of myopia and self-deception but the reality is far worse, for it reveals the same old imperial mindset that like Saigon in 1975, it was only when US helicopters hovered over the roof of the US embassy taking onboard the final remnants of an occupation force that the reality of the situation could not be avoided no matter how much 'spin' the media put on events?