

THE US IMPERIAL DESIGN & THE WAR OF RESISTANCE IN IRAQ

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Let us begin with the conclusion: the bad news is that the US occupation of Iraq is likely to continue for many years to come, the good news is that the strategic battle—the battle for the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqi people—has been won already by the forces of Iraqi resistance.

The occupation shall continue because the Americans have overwhelming military power but no clients that have the capacity to rule Iraq on their behalf. The resistance, by contrast, has won in the sense that it has already demonstrated the capacity to pin down the world’s most awesome military machine in combat on the ground; has helped explode the myth that Americans have come to give “democracy” to Iraq; has convinced most of the populace that violence and anarchy reigns in Iraq thanks to the Americans and that it is groups working on behalf of the Americans who have bombed the holy places of the nation and exploded bombs which lead to senseless killings of civilians. Americans will continue to occupy because no one appointed by them will henceforth have any legitimacy in the eyes of the common Iraqi, while free and fair elections will inevitably bring to power forces which will protect for the nation precisely those national assets—notably oil and the extensive state sector—which the invasion was designed to hand over to foreign corporations. Conversely, resistance can only grow because the US has not only overthrown the Saddam regime but has then proceeded to establish in Iraq a colonial administration, handing over its economy to the multinationals and imposing upon the great majority of the Iraqi people daily sufferings—in terms of the lack of jobs, health facilities, food provisions, security against crime, infrastructural facilities such as electricity and transport, and so on—unimaginable under the Saddam government even as it battled against the US-imposed sanctions. Whether this resistance shall eventually give rise to at least a modern, secular, progressive government after the US forces have been thrown out, or to an Iran-style theocracy, is still unclear; the future is still evolving. No one can deny, however, that the balance of power has shifted.

In short: the guerrilla has won, even though the actual fighting—hence anarchy for masses of people—may yet continue for many years to come.

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The US war against Iraq first began in 1991, in the course of the so-called Gulf War, when Baghdad was bombed and much of the Iraqi army that was retreating from Kuwait was decimated through aerial attacks against which that army had no defence. Over the next twelve years, the US-UK alliance dropped on Iraq a cumulative tonnage of bombs that would equal seven Hiroshimas; imposed upon that suffering country a ruthless regime of sanctions and embargos which is estimated to have killed half a

million Iraqi children and another one million Iraqi adults; imposed 'no-fly zones' over much of the country where the US could fly its military aircraft with impunity but the Iraqis themselves were forbidden to fly over their own national territory; openly encouraged secession by Kurdish ultra-national extremists; and systematically destroyed as much of the Iraqi infrastructure, industrial base, and oil-producing capacity as they could. Immediately after the events of 11th September 2001, and even though Iraq was in no way connected with the hijackings that led to the attack on the World Trade Centre, the US started systematic planning for a full-scale invasion of Iraq, even to the extent that the Bush Administration secretly—and illegally—appropriated \$ 700 million to prepare for that invasion two years before the war of occupation first began. All of this was done far from the Iraqi shores, from skies and seas, and with no US soldiers on Iraqi territory. The people of Iraq, with no access to sophisticated weaponry and no US soldiers to confront in direct combat, had no means of fighting back. Then came the full-scale invasion and the war of occupation.

This new and even more murderous phase of the US war in Iraq began on 20th March 2003 when the US-UK forces entered Iraqi territory from the South and a fresh wave of historically unprecedented bombings of Baghdad began, in a campaign of "Shock and Awe" which witnessed the most devastating bombings that any capital city in the world has ever suffered in the whole span of human history. The hapless country was swiftly occupied, in about three weeks, and on 1st of May 2003 George W. Bush, the US President who has never served in a military unit, put on military uniform and declared "victory." In an article I published in *Frontline* at that time, I argued that Bush had declared his victory much too soon, and that the real war was yet to come. The reasoning was quite simple. For twelve years, the US had imposed upon the Iraqi people a level of suffering so acute and so extremely widespread that the vast majority was seething with hatred of the imperialist power, regardless of what they might have thought of Saddam Hussein's autocracy. The invasion itself had been carried out with such brutality, and with such overwhelming military power and the most modern military technology, that the common people of Iraq had no way of resisting it right away. However, once the US, the UK and their smaller allies had troops on the ground, in the form of a colonial army spread out into the country, real combat could then begin. Not right away, since the masses had not been trained and organised for guerrilla warfare by the intensely anti-communist Baathist regime that had just collapsed under the US assault. Independent progressive and patriotic forces had been suppressed throughout the era of Baathist rule for some forty years, and the general populace had been exhausted by more than a decade of US-imposed sanctions. Any coherent resistance could only emerge over a period of time. And so it did, faster than most of us had imagined.

From the very beginning, resistance has taken two distinct forms which have for the most part remained distinct but have also overlapped at important points. There is the overflowing of political resistance in the form of demonstrations, newspapers, leaflets, public speeches, sermons in holy places, and so on. And, alongside this non-combatant, peaceful

resistance which mobilises public opinion against foreign occupation, armed actions by small groups also began emerging within the first three months of the occupation. In the beginning, the armed resistance was confined to a relatively small area comprised of districts mainly to the north of Baghdad itself whereas the political resistance comprised of mass mobilizations was from the beginning spread over vast areas of the country, as much in the north as in the south and the east, involving both of the major Islamic denominations in Iraq, namely the Shia as well as the Sunni. In both cases, the outstanding feature of the political resistance as well as of the armed combat has been its extreme decentralization. As months passed, two shifts became discernible. One was that even as the occupiers kept talking about “remnants” and “small groups” of “Saddam loyalists” making a last-ditch stand even as most Iraqi were said to be enthusiastic supporters of the American masters, the territorial expanse where direct combat was taking place as well as the frequency of attacks by the Iraqi resistance kept widening and increasing, while the capture of Saddam Hussein, which was supposed to have ended all resistance by these so-called “loyalists”, in fact made no difference to the expansion of the resistance and the increasing ferocity of the armed confrontations. The second major shift over the months was that while attacks in the early months were essentially hit-&-run operations by very small groups, battles became increasingly more intense, involving larger groups, very frequently in densely populated urban areas with attackers enjoying visible widespread support among the immediate populace. Geographically, the resistance was now spread over most of the national territory, across the respective regions with the Arab-Sunni, or the Shia, or the Kurdish concentrations. Hit-&-run operations were now increasingly combined with more recognizable forms of urban warfare, much larger sections of the urban population were now more actively and visibly sympathetic toward the arms resistance, combat was correspondingly more concentrated in cities and towns than in the outlying areas of the countryside and the desert, and there was much greater propensity now on the part of the resistance forces to take over and hold for varying durations of time specific towns and/or parts of larger cities. The nation was occupied but fast becoming altogether ungovernable.

Bush made his arrogant, premature announcement of “victory” in May 2003. Eleven months later, in the first week of April 2004, Iraqi resistance first took on the proportions of a something resembling a national uprising, as battles broke out simultaneously in a large number of cities, including Baghdad, Basra, Fallujah, Ramadi, Najaf, Nasiriyah, Amarah, Kirkuk and so on. In the interim, the US acted on the assumption that appointing a government of clients and direct takeover of Iraq’s vast economic assets would be as easy as the military occupation of the country had been, and it only needed to “mop up” the few disgruntled elements (“remnants” of the “Saddam regime,” as it called them) who dared to put up a fight. This “mopping up” was to be carried out with enormous brutality, so as to also terrorize the rest of the populace into submission. As the resistance spread, the level of brutality also increased, which in turn united more and more people in solidarity with the forces of

resistance. By April 2004, the US took three steps which may eventually go down in the history of this war as the ones that decisively shifted the balance of moral force between the occupier and the occupied, in favour of the latter. First, it laid siege to the city of the predominantly Sunni city of Fallujah when forces of resistance there killed some mercenaries working for US contractors, on the pretext that it was a stronghold of “Saddam loyalists” who needed to be taught a tough and perhaps final lesson. Now, Fallujah has certainly been a centre of anti-imperialist resistance since the US occupation but the idea that all Iraqi Sunnis are “Saddam loyalists” is a pathetic figment of the American imagination. Fallujah is in fact a centre of the Wahabbi variant of Islamic fundamentalism and its religious elite have a rich history of persecution by the stridently secular Saddam regime; it is a centre of anti-American resistance not out of any love for Saddam but out of hatred for foreign, colonial occupation. The extraordinarily brutal American siege—killing at least 600 people—not only united the city against them but also brought forth an extraordinary wave of solidarity with the city elsewhere in Iraq; convoys of people came with food and medicine for their besieged compatriots, and countless shopkeepers in Baghdad itself were reported to be collecting money for their compatriots in Fallujah. Belatedly, the Americans requested a ceasefire. Outgunned militarily, the city won in the moral realm.

Fallujah was said to be anti-American because it was Sunni. Shias, by contrast, were supposedly friends of the US. That was the American fantasy. Just as they were laying siege to Fallujah, the Shia sections of Baghdad erupted in a rebellion so intense that the US was forced to use the Apache helicopter-gunships to put it down, on the pretext that they were “containing” the “terrorists” loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr, whom Paul Bremer, the US proconsul in Baghdad, had declared an “outlaw.” Indeed, the US has issued arrest warrants for al-Sadr and tends to portray him as a “firebrand” and a minor cleric whose militia is something of a minor irritant. Nothing could be farther than the truth. Muqtada al-Sadr is the nephew of the greatly revered religious figure, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who had been assassinated by Saddam Hussein and whose mantle the nephew has inherited; the latter is said to command a militia of some 10,000 devotees, is said to command direct allegiance of several hundred thousand and may be respected by as many as perhaps a third of the Iraqi Shia—which comes to the total of about a third of the Iraqi population. Transnationally, his uncle was the mentor of Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, generally considered the founder of the the Lebanese Shia organization Hizbollah which fought against the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon for 18 years and finally succeeded in driving away the occupiers—the only time in history that Israel has been forced by military means to relinquish the territory it has occupied. Any prolonged confrontation between the US and the young Muqtada is likely to unite the more militant sections of the Shia across the middle East, in their hundreds of thousands, behind Muqtada and would consequently put enormous pressure on the more sedate and senior Shia clerics, such as Ayatollah al-Sistani, to adopt a harder posture against the US if they are

not to lose substantial sections of their own following.

US propaganda speaks constantly of an impending "civil war" between Shias and Sunnis in Iraq. In reality, no Iraqi is yet on record preaching communal strife between Shias and Sunnis. The earliest demonstrations in Baghdad after the US occupation were deliberately organised as united Sunni-Shia demonstrations, the first spectacular one taking off from in front of a Sunni mosque and including large numbers of Shias from the poorer neighbourhoods of Baghdad. The simultaneous uprisings of the Sunnis in the North and the of the Shias in the South in April 2004 is in keeping with these early trends which have just become stronger; during this very uprising, the US-appointed officials were evicted out of Sadr City, the vast Shia section of Baghdad named after Muqtada's uncle, by a combined force of Shias and Sunnis which is said to have included very few members of Muqtada's militia, the Jaish-e-Mahdi. The US has sought to create a communal divide between Shias and Sunnis in Iraq even as it oppresses the nation as a whole; in reality, no such communal divide has existed in Iraq historically, and oppression of the nation as a whole has only served to bring members of the two sects together in something of a national alliance against the foreign occupiers.

Signs of crisis for the US are everywhere, leading to very contradictory trends. Within Iraq, five members of the US-appointed National Congress have resigned in protest against the US tactics against the April uprising. More significantly, a US general has been quoted as saying that 10 per cent of the new security forces which the US had assembled is now fighting on the side of the resistance and another 40 per cent has simply deserted; those who are still serving the US are said to wear facial masks so that no Iraqis would recognize them and punish them afterwards. Another general is quoted as saying that even those in the security forces which are still serving are so thoroughly "infiltrated" by the resistance forces that the US cannot rely upon them wholly. The US keeps declaring that it will transfer sovereignty to some representative body of Iraqis in June, and then more fully in early 2005, but the level of violence and the refusal to hold general elections are the kind of factors which further erode any commitment to such a transfer. In the international arena, the US has acted so unilaterally in invading Iraq against not only the advice of some of its own best minds but also against the advice of its closest allies that it dare not approach the Security Council for a resolution authorizing its future aims in Iraq. Even the capture of Saddam Hussein, so played up in the media for a couple of days, has become an immense liability. While most Iraqis feel humiliated that their former head of state, no matter how cruel and dictatorial, has been so humiliated by a foreign power, the US has no means to put him on trial in a way that gives even a minimum semblance of justice.

Similar confusions prevail at home. The Bush Administration has deliberately created a sense of great insecurity among the American people after the World Trade Centre attack of 11 September 2001 which is then sought to justify wars against all and sundry. Support for Bush was very great for a long time but disenchantment seems to be growing among the American people. According to the latest polls, majority of

Americans no longer support Bush on a whole range of his economic and military policies, and a majority now believes that the war on Iraq to evict Saddam from power was wrong; this sentiment is likely to grow as more American corpses come home. Major figures, such as the Secretary of State Colin Powell, have taken to confiding in journalists, in extensive detail but off the record, how they disagreed with the way the US invaded Iraq virtually unilaterally and on grounds of very flimsy evidence. On the other hand, liberal democrats such as Hillary Clinton are asking for more troops to be sent to Iraq, in addition to 110,000 already there (plus another 40,000 from 'allies'), and even the Democratic Party's prospective presidential candidate, John Kerry, is accusing Bush of not being tough enough and "staying the course." Stage seems to be set for the US to adopt tougher policies, perhaps even send in more troops, in the hope of breaking the will of the resistance but mainly because it does not know how to either win the war or to extricate itself from a war that is unwinnable—exactly the way it was in Vietnam in the mid-60s when the number of US troops just kept going up because retreat from a quagmire was declared unacceptable.

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Only a year separates the US declaration of "victory" in May 2003 and the massive rebellion of April 2004. What, precisely, has happened during this year which has made this whole development possible?

The war of occupation itself was launched on 20th March 2003 in a murderous and spectacular show of American military power and was sold to the world as a campaign of "Shock and Awe" that was said to be designed to liberate Iraq from Baathist tyranny, to eliminate Saddam's arsenal of the weapons of mass destruction, to lead a coalition of civilized nations against terrorism, to bring democracy to the Iraqi people and indeed to the whole of the Middle East, and with other such noble aims. Since then, the scale of destruction has indeed been, and continues to be, shocking and awesome while the Baathist regime has been destroyed and Saddam captured. But Iraq has witnessed not the emergence of democracy but the imposition of a quasi-colonial rule and a reign of terror by the occupying forces, which is giving birth to a new class of the rich and the super-rich but has meant unemployment rates of 50 per cent and above, generalised lack of security for the populace, lack of basic requirements such as clean water and electricity and health facilities, outbreak of a variety of diseases, and marauding criminal gangs which seem to proliferate under the very eyes of the occupation forces. However cruel and dictatorial Saddam's regime might have been, it was also the most highly developed welfare state in the Arab East and the Iraqi people never suffered the kind of deprivation they have had to face since their "liberation."

A major war aim has indeed been realized in so far as Saddam Hussain has been captured, though only after nine months of hiding on Iraqi soil under occupation. The Anglo-American bloc quickly announced that he would be treated as a prisoner of war and would soon be tried in an Iraqi court. But that was three months ago, in mid-December 2003. As we predicted at the time, he has been kept away from the public eye, has

been provided neither facilities for legal defence nor right to visits by family or friends or independent lawyers, has been infinitely "interrogated" with no results of these interrogations revealed publicly and there are no modalities or dates for the trial announced yet. Salem Chalabi, the nephew of Ahmed Chalabi who has emerged as America's favourite as a ruler of the future Iraq, has been put in charge of preparing the case against him, and it is said that panels of Iraqi judges are in the process of being appointed for the tribunal and a the court of appeals for the planned war crimes trials not only of Saddam Hussain but also some others. It is not clear when and where the trial shall be held. Essentially, the Americans don't really know what to do. Since Saddam was captured by them, a foreign power in Iraq, and since he is to be charged for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the proper place to put him on trial should be the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague. However, the Americans consider the IIC a dangerous institution because it might then try the Anglo-American bloc itself for illegal occupation of a member country of the United Nations, without authorization of the Security Council. They are also deeply dismayed by the way the trial of Slobodan Milosevic, the former Yugoslav President, which has gone on for two years and has given him the right to interrogate the prosecution and its witnesses and has now given him another two years to mount his defence. That court may just allow Saddam to call the top US officials such as Donald Rumsfeld to the witness stand! Nor can the US afford to have Saddam appear in an Iraqi court, day in and day out, in a trial that has the semblance of due procedure and is covered in the media. Not a single Arab regime has dared to show pleasure at Saddam's capture; his daily appearance in a court of the US puppets is more than they have bargained for. Saddam in captivity is turning out to be more of an embarrassment for the US than Saddam in hiding and at large.

Then, there are the daily atrocities. Every American soldier who died has been counted and honoured: there have been 536 of them, fewer during the invasion and many more during the occupation. The Anglo-American invading bloc, duly recognised by the Security Council as the sovereign occupying authority, has never counted the Iraqi dead; estimates range between 15,000 and 55,000, and about 11,000 Iraqi prisoners are held by the Americans in the largest prison that Saddam Hussain had built for his "tyranny." About 130,000 US troops and some 30,000 troops from 34 other members of the United Nations continue to occupy Iraq illegally, while Baghdad has become the largest station that the CIA has had anywhere in the world since the fall of Pentagon in 1975. A symbolic withdrawal of about 20,000 is expected by the end of June this year but 100,000 of the US troops and the bulk of the allied ones are expected to remain more or less indefinitely, and NATO is soon to begin top-level deliberations on the question of entering Iraq formally, alongside the Americans.

As for "democracy," L. Paul Bremer, the top US civilian official in Iraq, acts as a Proconsul with unlimited powers, aided by the civilian counterpart of the occupying army which calls itself Provisional Coalition Authority (CPA) and which has in turn appointed a hand-picked 24-

member Iraqi National Council (INC) headed by Ahmed Chalabi, a convicted criminal who is wanted by the Jordanian courts which sentenced him to life imprisonment for embezzlement of \$300 million. A provisional constitution which was drafted by the Americans has been signed by members of the INC with much fanfare but Shia leaders, notably the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani and leaders of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution, have said that this provisional constitution will have no legitimacy until accepted by an elected National Assembly. Under this provisional constitution, the INC is to hand over power to a new entity which too shall be 'selected' from caucuses through a process in which the PCA and the INC shall have veto powers in determining as to who can stand as a candidate.

The INC itself can exercise no power that the Americans do not sanction, and once this non-power has been transferred from the appointed ones to the selected ones at the end of June, the US shall then declare that "sovereignty" now rests in Iraqi hands. Bremer himself may then depart but the new Iraqi entity shall then "request" that the occupying military forces and their civilian counterparts remain. Nothing of substance shall change and the whole charade is getting enacted so that George Bush, who is facing elections in November can claim that occupation has ended, "sovereignty" has been transferred and troops are beginning to come home. The ridiculous nature of this charade became quite clear when the new Prime Minister-elect of Spain, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, announced that he intends to bring back Spanish troops from Iraq by the end of June when their mandate runs out and "sovereignty" is "transferred" to Iraqis. A whole range of US politicians, including John Kerry, the leading Democratic Presidential aspirant, urged him openly not to do so, and the Foreign Minister of Poland, which leads the European contingent in which the Spanish troops are serving, said that troops should remain in place.

Bremer had disbanded the Iraqi armed forces and police in a grand gesture of 'de-Baathification', which had the incidental effect of inflicting unemployment on hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. By now, the CIA has identified 11,000 individuals who formed the core of the secret police and paramilitary apparatus of the Baathist regime and is now training them to form the core of the regime the Americans are now putting together, having satisfied itself that this change of loyalties, from the previous regime to the new one, on the part of this hand-picked personnel shall be smooth. Tens of thousands of others are also being screened and re-employed for service in police and the new army. Before the invasion, many US "experts" used to say that the US can easily live with the existing Iraqi regime if Saddam and his group can be eliminated. A version of that is now afoot: screening, re-grouping, re-deployment of the core personnel of the previous regime in the service of the new, puppet regime of Chalabi and the rest. Which of course explains why these collaborators have now become the main targets of attack by the Iraqi resistance.

One cannot say, though, that the war of occupation has entirely failed in its larger objectives. The fact that the resistance has been able to pin down 150,000 occupying troops while Iraq remains largely

ungovernable for the PCA and the INC has of course meant that the Bush Administration's dreams of quickly marching on to Damascus and Teheran have had to be given up. However, a key objective of the invasion of Iraq was to produce a "demonstration effect" for other governments in the larger region—to show what could be done to them—and the occupation of Iraq has certainly brought them dividends elsewhere. Coupled with the economic sanction that the US Senate has imposed, this "demonstration effect" has certainly pressed Syria into compliance with the demand that it give no protection or support to the Iraqi resistance and that it substantially accede to the demands of the US-Israeli axis, even to the extent of re-opening 'peace talks' even as Israel continues its relentless campaign of carnage and mass murder in Palestine. Iran has not only opened up its own nuclear facilities but also recognised the US-appointed Iraqi National Council, entertained Chalabi in Tehran and leaned on al-Sistani and other Iraqi Shia leaders to cooperate with the Americans. Libya has not only abandoned its own nuclear program but even shipped the secret blueprints and components to the US while inviting the US oil corporations back for exploitation of its oil resources.

The situation for the Bush-Blair duo is not quite so rosy within the imperialist heartland. This heartland can be divided for purposes into (a) the Anglo-American core and (b) continental Europe, Japan and little dependencies in Asia and elsewhere. Within the core, the main problem is that of (1) casualties (close to 600 for the US and UK), (2) the wide and ever-widening perception that these lives and some \$ 200 billion have been expended in a war based on huge pack of lies which keep getting exposed day after day, and (3) the fear that the invasion and occupation of Iraq has done nothing to reduce and much to greatly increase the threat of terrorism—a fear greatly increased after the recent Madrid bombings which killed 200 people, injured another 1500 and dramatically changed the result of the elections that followed a few days later. For the rest, the situation is somewhat different in the two countries.

In the UK, the economy is strong, based largely on the strength of the sterling, and support for the ruling Labour Party is consequently very far from crumbling, and the Tories at any rate are as pro-war and pro-American as Blair himself. However, dissent from the war policies is much more vigorous and widespread within the ruling party itself, impressive and influential sections of the media are much more vigorous and persistently interrogative, political culture is itself livelier, and many more people are attuned to developments in continental Europe, so that the Franco-German reservations about the war are known better and taken much more seriously than in the US, and the recent events in Spain can potentially have much more explosive impact. The result is that even as there is no decline in the support for Labour as the ruling party, the personal popularity of Blair keeps going down, as the Prime Minister who took the British people into an unnecessary war, told lies to justify a war that was planned in Washington for specifically American objectives, and a war furthermore that has made London more vulnerable to terrorist attacks than it was in the past. However, in Britain, as in the UK, there is no strong anti-war candidate who can lead either party to electoral victory

and the tenure of the present parliament does not end until 2006 anyway. So, a radical change at the level of government and government policy seems unlikely in the short run. Two possibilities are emerging now, however. One is that if Blair's personal ratings keep falling over the next few months and if his heap of lies really become impossible for his party to support, he may be forced to step down in someone else's favour—Gordon Brown is waiting in the wings—who may not have significant differences with Blair but who will then be forced to scale down the level of belligerence and adopt more 'European' policies, aligning himself somewhat with France, Germany and the new Spanish government. The second possibility, which dovetails into the first, is that the recent Spanish events shall re-invigorate the opposition in Britain and Blair's position, already weak, may become altogether untenable under the impact.

In the US, by contrast, the economy is in a shambles and the dollar has been sliding precipitously, Bush's own lies have been exposed just as much as Blair's and even the dominant media cannot evade this fact, and the November elections are looming. However, opposition to the war designs of the Bush Administration is virtually non-existent in those sections of both the Republican and Democratic Parties which command decisive power within the establishment and all sections of the capitalist class are much more firmly aligned with Bush's war designs. The occupation of Iraq is ultimately about corporate plunder, the US capital sees that clearly and will not allow either party to reverse those policies to any significant degree. All the establishment forces have made sure that the virtually unchallenged and leading contender for the Democratic Party nomination as the Presidential candidate be none other than John Kerry, a cynic *par excellence*.

John Kerry is man who knows how to speak from each side of his mouth, according to the audience he is facing. For pro-war, militaristic audiences, he harps on the fact that he was a heavily decorated fighter in Vietnam; for audiences opposed to invasion and occupation of Iraq, he recalls that he joined the anti-war movement after returning from Vietnam. He criticizes Bush for lying to the American public but rules out any withdrawal from Iraq if he were to be elected. When Spain elected a new Prime Minister who was committed to withdrawing Spanish troops from Iraq by June, Kerry promptly phoned him to drop his promise and got rebuked. When the US Senate passed a resolution giving Bush unlimited powers to make war, Kerry, a senior Democratic Senator, was one of the vocal supporters of that resolutions and told, on his own authority, every lie that Bush had been telling. "Iraq has chemical and biological weapons" he said and claimed, against all the evidence the UN inspectors had themselves amassed, that Iraq's programmes for production of such weapons were "larger and more advanced than they were before the Gulf War [of 1991]." He claimed that Iraq was "attempting to develop nuclear weapons," which too was rejected by the UN inspectors. His allegations bordered on the fantastic: "Iraq is developing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) capable of delivering chemical and biological warfare agents, which could threaten Iraq's neighbours as well as American forces in the Persian Gulf." Every one of these lies has been nailed but neither Bush nor

Kerry have come forward to apologize for telling them to a frightened American public. These are the two liars who will fight the US Presidential elections in November 2004.

On the European continent, meanwhile, the situation is markedly different. The French were quick to align fully with the US in the recent ouster of a democratically elected President in Haiti, but they have always perceived that the US war in Iraq is against French interest and Chirac has so far been the most vocal European head of state in opposition to the US policies there, in which he is greatly supported by the French public. In Germany, it is well known that Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder was trailing behind his rival during the elections of September 2002 and then won the elections due to his clear-cut opposition to the proposed participation of Germany in the Iraq venture. That was the first European election to be decided on the issue of Iraq. Now there has been a second one, in Spain, which has the potential of becoming a European earthquake.

Aznar, the Prime Minister who lost the Spanish election by a wide margin on the single issue of the Spanish troops that he had dispatched to Iraq on the US side, was Bush's closest ally in continental Europe. Mr. Zapatero, the Socialist Prime Minister-elect, fought a campaign on the promise of reversing that policy and scored a clear-cut victory in a voter turnout of 76 per cent. "The war in Iraq was a disaster," he has said, and "the occupation of Iraq is a disaster." In a radio interview immediately after getting elected he said, "Bush and Blair must do some reflection and self-criticism. You cannot organize a war on lies." When Kerry called him and asked that he change his policy, Zapatero replied that it was a campaign promise and "I am a man of my commitments." He has declared that he will align Spain's policies with France and Germany and will open a dialogue with those other European governments who have sent troops to Iraq, so as to obtain a general withdrawal. However, he cannot easily abandon his clear-cut assertion, time and again, that Spain has no business in Iraq unless the occupying authority is dismantled, the UN assumes control of that situation, and NATO itself decides to assume a direct role in Iraq—something that the Americans cannot concede, even though Zapatero's position is just a more radicalized version of the Franco-German position.

Spanish elections are in a sense a combined achievement of the European anti-war movement and the persistence of the Iraqi resistance which has made the occupation so very untenable, showing it to be a classically colonial-imperialist venture. Whether or not Zapatero will actually carry out his promise is yet to be seen. One can say quite confidently, though, that the balance of force in Europe has shifted. Blair's New Labour is now fully isolated from Europe's two major social democratic parties, the German and the Spanish, and is placed somewhat to the right of the French Right; Blair's only major ally in Europe now is Italy's far right premier, Berlusconi. Meanwhile, the hugely prestigious European Commission President Romano Prodi, who is the main opponent of Berlusconi, told the *La Stampa* newspaper after the recent Madrid bombings that "These terrible days have shown us that the American recipe wasn't right. On Saturday, it will be a year since the start of the war

in Iraq, and the terrorist threat is today infinitely more powerful than before.” Like Aznar’s regime, Berlusconi’s in Italy had also dispatched Italian troops to buttress US claims of widespread support, despite the fact that the Spanish and Italian masses were the most bitter opponents of the American war in Iraq; Florence, Rome and Barcelona were the hub of the extraordinary anti-war movement which developed in Europe before the invasion of Iraq. The Italian population too may throw out its premier when the time comes.

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The world, the Third World in particular, owes the Iraqi resistance an immense debt of gratitude. The existence of the Soviet Union and the support it offered to national liberation struggles was a great contributing factor in the very large numbers of such struggles that erupted throughout the world after the Bolshevik Revolution. The wars of national liberation in countries of Indochina, in the Portuguese colonies in Africa, as well as revolutions in such countries as Cuba and Southern Yemen would have been inconceivable without that pole of resistance against imperialism, US imperialism in particular. Even policies of non-alignment and relatively independent development that were followed in diverse countries in the Third World, including such countries as India or Egypt or Iraq itself, presumed that alternative pole of support. The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to enormous despondency throughout the world, with a widespread sense that imperialism was now invincible. The Sandanistas in Nicaragua had to beat a retreat, and the anti-apartheid forces in South Africa, sustained so much by the Soviet Union, were forced to make a compromise with imperialism as they won the war locally but lost the great ally that the Soviet union had been.

The US launched its war on Iraq with the confidence that a poor Third World country now had no choice but to submit to its dictates, and the occupation of Iraq was to serve as an example to every Third World country as a demonstration of what could be done to it if it dared to defy. The Iraqi people have risen in glorious defiance, forcing the United States itself into a crisis, pinning down the world’s most awesome military machine, creating a full-scale cleavage in the European state system, and setting an example for the Third World that even a full-scale military occupation can be resisted and fought back by a people who have suffered some fifteen years of the most brutal aggression. The US-UK alliance had thought that the demise of the USSR had ushered in an era where colonial occupation would yet again be the order of the day. The people of Iraq have shown that even in this era, when revolutions of the working class have suffered a historic setback, war of national liberation remains on the agenda. Indeed, people’s wars against imperialism shall be the motor force of the history of the 21stth century until such time as the anti-imperialist revolution gets transformed into revolutions against capitalism itself and the transition to socialism is resumed on the global scale.