

The Surge of Death

By Tim Dobson

On January 10, George Bush announced that they would increase US troop presence by 21,500, from the current level of 132,000 to over 150,000. The troop increase, known to most as the “surge”, will see the extra troops sent to Baghdad and to Anbar province, two areas where the Iraqi resistance is particularly strong. The increase is being justified on the grounds that an increase will allow US troops to “take control” and defeat the “terrorists” or “prevent a civil war”. However, the result of the surge will be to intensify the occupation and cause more death and destruction.

Since the occupation began there have been over 655,000 Iraqi deaths. Millions more have been injured. Daily kidnappings now average a total of 40 per day, as compared to 3 per day in 2004. Over 3,000 US soldiers have been killed, more than any other conflict since the Vietnam War and more than were killed in the 9/11 attacks. Also, at least 23,114 US soldiers have been injured, at the rate of 16 per day. The average household in Iraq now gets two hours of electricity a day. There is 70 percent unemployment, 68 per cent of Iraqis have no access to safe drinking water and only 19 per cent have sewage access. Oil production has not risen to pre-invasion levels, when the oil-for-food programme limited Iraqi production. On every single level, the occupation has been an unmitigated disaster.

There are two opposing perspectives on the internal political situation in Iraq today, that of the mainstream media and that of reality. To the mainstream media, the conflict is like a virtual football game, with the three teams being the Sunni, Shia and the Kurds, who have a particular dislike for each other. This is wrong, on a purely elementary basis, in the fact that the majority of Iraqi Kurds are also Sunni as well. More importantly, it is wrong because it is based on the belief that all the violence is because of religious and/or ethnic conflict, rather than because of the occupation. The focus on seeing Iraq as a religious or ethnic conflict is very convenient for those who conducted the war, because; (a) it completely lets them off the hook, (b) it puts the blame of all the violence onto the victims of the war, (c) it provides a justification to maintain and even extend the occupation.

There is a civil war going on right now in Iraq. But this is largely between what is broadly known as the “resistance”, made up of all ethnic groups in Iraq, and the Iraq government, who daily uphold, allow and justify US Occupation. Sectarian

violence between Shia and Sunni is one way in which the resistance can be divided and defeated by Iraqi and US forces. That is why the US has played a role in making sure such violence does happen, by invoking the “Salvador Option”, which as journalist John Pilger explains; “[The Salvador Option] is the campaign of terror by death squads armed and trained by the US, which attack Sunnis and Shias alike. The goal is the incitement of a real civil war and the break-up of Iraq”. The Iraqi government has been a willing participant in this.

However, there have been fractures in the relationship between the United States and the Iraqi government, which could lead a future Iraqi government pursue to a closer relationship with Iran. It is wrong to see the current Iraqi government as the puppets of the United States. Obviously, any government under occupation is severely limited in the independence it can assert. But the United States has

consistently supported the Iraqi National List, led by former Baa’thist and CIA agent, Iyad Allawi. In both elections they came a distant third, mostly because in Iraq there is widespread recognition that he is basically a puppet of the United States. It is a political advantage for any Iraqi party or politician to be seen as separate as possible from the occupation.



The Iraqi government was probably one of the strongest in the Arab World in criticizing Israel’s war in Lebanon, so much so that Howard Dean, Chairman of the Democratic Party stated “the Iraqi Prime Minister is an anti-Semite. We don’t need to spend \$200 and \$300 and \$500 billion

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dollars bringing democracy to Iraq to turn it over to people who believe Israel doesn't have the right to defend itself and to refuse to condemn Hezbollah." The US administration and military, as well as Democrats like Hillary Clinton, have criticized the Iraqi government for not using enough force to deal with militants. They haven't used as much force as they could because they recognize that if they did, it would only intensify the civil war directed at them.

Another neglected disagreement between the Iraqi government and the US is over the economic organization of their society. Their original constitution, written by the Iraqi National Assembly, contained statements affirming that "social justice is the basis of building Iraqi society", that it would help in "providing work opportunities for every able-bodied citizen" and "all natural resources are owned by the people. The state shall preserve and invest in them well". All of these statements were removed from the constitution, because of US pressure. The constitution now is neo-liberal in its approach and accordingly, the Iraqi economy is structured this way.

These economic policies have had dire consequences for the Iraqi people. As mentioned before unemployment is at 70%, while interestingly, US authorities have a labour shortage, very few Iraqis are prepared to work for them. The economy had a deep recession in 2005, losing 3% of GDP. Provision of basic goods and services is shocking. Malnutrition among Iraqi children (already high because of UN sanctions) has doubled since the war. These policies are causing widespread dissent against the Iraqi government and the occupying US army.

The United States, however, is looking increasingly desperate. Every event is portrayed as a "turning point" after which the resistance can and will be defeated. When Saddam's sons were killed, it was claimed to be a dent to the resistance. When Saddam was captured, that was meant to be it. Same when Zarqawi was killed. And now it is Saddam's hanging which will supposedly "end the conflict". All of this is based on the absurd belief that the resistance in Iraq is made up of mostly Al-Qaeda members and Ba'athists looking for the restoration of Saddam Hussein. The majority of the resistance fighters are Iraqi civilians looking for the expulsion of occupying troops from their country. This was confirmed in a poll conducted by the University of Michigan, which found that 91.7% of all Iraqis opposed the presence of coalition forces in their country and of those 84.5% were strongly opposed to their presence.

The hanging of Saddam Hussein has had little to no political impact. It may bring some short-term happiness to some Iraqis, particularly the Iraqi Kurds, who were killed without mercy by Saddam. The question that really comes out of it is the one posed by Independent journalist Robert Fisk, when he asked "Have ever justice and hypocrisy been so obscenely joined?" Indeed, Saddam was guilty of what he was charged for (killing 148 civilians from the village of Dujail, after a failed assassination attempt occurred there in 1982). But what is more interesting is what he wasn't charged for. What he was not charged with was the much greater crime of the ethnic cleansing of the Kurdish Population. Between 1987 and 1988, the Iraqi government massacred 180,000 Kurds, which was supported entirely and armed by Western governments such as the United States and France. He wasn't charged with all the executions that took place in Abu Ghraib, which is now a dirty word. Nor was he charged with war crimes in Iran and his role in killing over 500,000 Iranians, because again, he had the support of the United States.



In Australia, the support for immediate withdrawal of Australian troops is 60%, and all opposition parties are calling for the withdrawal of Australian troops. There will be major world wide protests occurring on March 17 (the fourth anniversary of the invasion) demanding that all troops are withdrawn and to see an end to this vile, disgusting occupation which daily is killing hundreds of people and destroying a nation.