

The background of the cover features a blurred American flag with its stars and stripes, viewed through a network of dark, sharp barbed wire. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong red and orange glow on the right side, suggesting fire or a sunset. A yellow, torn-edge banner is positioned in the middle-left area, containing the title text.

**IRAQ**  
The Torments  
of Empire

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CITIZENS INTERNATIONAL

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# Iraq: The Torments of Empire

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“The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour. They have been tricked into it by a steady withholding of information.” — T.E. Lawrence, Sunday Times, 22 August 1920

**T**.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia or to his imperialist sycophants as “the hero of the Arab revolt”, went on to note that “our unfortunate troops, Indian and British [i.e., Caribbean], under hard conditions of climate and supply, are policing an immense area, paying dearly every day in lives for the willfully wrong policy ... in Baghdad.” Once again, it was the ‘wogs’ being sacrificed in the higher interests of preserving and extending the grab of British imperialism according to the victors’ dictates of the Treaty of Versailles. An annexation that would fling open to the new imperial conquistadores the Black Gold of a new El Dorado rivalling in its splendour, the plunder of the Indian sub-continent. Nor should it be surprising that Lawrence, who was a passionate believer in the unity of theory and practice, became a major shareholder in the Kirkuk oilfields and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

Lawrence was not against this massive imperial aggrandizement, for his duplicity and treachery of the Arab elite were the underpinnings of imperial policy in the Middle East. What he feared was that “illiberal policies” would incubate countervailing nationalist currents, ultimately alienating the Arab masses, and undercut the occupant’s exploitative ambition. What he sought was recognition of the “native rulers”; not as partners or as equals, but as benevolent servants who could be formally elevated — in the words of Lord Linlithgow — “to the status of gentlemen” when imperial dictates so required.

In the wake of the criminal invasion of a stricken Iraq, one which flouted the UN Charter and circumvented the Security Council, his utterance has had an eerily familiar ring since the official end of the war on 1 May. The emergence of the popular revolt that Lawrence and the British imperial caste feared materialized in the twenties, but the anti-colonial struggle would be protracted, with many ebbs and flows. Then, as now, oil became the overriding determinant of policies. Although the British stooge Nuri-es-said was captured on 14 July 1958, dressed as a woman while trying to escape, it did not terminate British ownership, control and marketing of Iraqi oil. As one Iraqi historian reminds us: “Did we throw the British out? Of course not. They were the absolute masters of our petroleum industry until it was nationalized as late as 1972.” And he added: “The British got everything they came for and even more.” The “more” was the region’s permanent political enfeeblement, the installation of a pliant dummy regime that presented the fiction of independence.

Lawrence, indubitably the most perfidious of architects of imperial rule, castigated the British occupation, in a genial understatement, for “a steady withholding of information.”

Indeed, if only we could wrench him from his grave to witness the strides and stratagems of the propaganda war then and now. It had been a piddling affair compared to the systematically globalized barrage of corporate media- and state-inspired mendacity — *le mensonge d'état*, as Ignacio Ramonet called it — that had no precedent in terms of its sheer international intensity 24 hours a day, hitting its grand climacteric in the immediate days preceding the Blair/Bush butchery on 20 April 2003.

Only after the invasion, in the face of the unrelenting lies pouring out of Washington and the vilification to which he was personally subjected, did the all-too-timorous Dr Hans Blix, head of the UN weapons inspection team, muster the courage to blast Washington's propaganda machine as "the handiwork of a bunch of bastards". Lashing out at his tormentors on Swedish radio, he pointed out that "I never understood how those who wanted armed action could be 100% sure that they [weapons of mass destruction] existed, but at the same time have zero knowledge of where they were."

Blix may well have extrapolated his caustic commentary to incriminate the spinmeister in 10 Downing Street. But our world is changing fast and others are now cutting into the unreconstructed politico that is Blair in their quest for greater transparency and dignity. Who could have imagined the celerity and boldness of this drive in the tumultuous days of imperial jubilation despite the shabby cover-up as was foreseeable by the official judicial inquiry?

The indefatigable spinmeister has lost all shred of credibility and stands distraught in all his nakedness. The meretricious slogans of yesteryear, "Cool Britannia", "New Labour"

and "The Third Way", have trailed him into the gutter, with no hope that history will "absolve" him as he so passionately sought.

As for Bush, his accomplice in one of the gravest crimes against humanity in our times, he too is wallowing, like Macbeth, in a cesspool of blood coupled with his calamitous miscalculations. Unmasked as a tormented and hapless creature scrambling to halt the breakup of his crumbling empire. His predicament recalls John Milton's pithy comment on Charles I: "a man blighted, friendless and forlorn." It is my central thesis that the gravest of war crimes committed against Iraq will turn out to be one of the crucial points of inflection in the debacle of imperialism.

What were the victim's alleged crimes? It was demonized as the fount of global terrorism armed with weapons of mass destruction that could be hurled against the civilized world in 45 minutes. The preachment was flimsy and timeworn: "It is either civilization or chaos," said Powell, or, in Bush's lingo, "You're either with us or against us."

The countdown to the current racist genocide began well before 20 April. An imperial aggressor of 290 million and its jackal's 60 million, or a combined total of 350 million, savagely pounced on a nation of 25 million. An unspeakable act of bestiality by the two richest nations in the world against one of the poorest, bled white over the last decade by sanctions and bombings. Bush the 'reborn Christian' and his no-less-zealous Anglican began their slaughter accompanied by the hymn of "Onward Christian Soldiers".

God marches hand in hand with the crusaders in that the powers of almighty providence were corralled to battle "the tyranny of evil". Theirs was the noblest of crusades, executed in the name of their perverted conception of human rights,

democracy and an endless array of such scurrilous concoctions. The approach to war acquired a messianic character blessed by a providential agency. A thread of ruling-class hubris that runs through American history. "The US," exclaimed Bush, "has a spiritual energy that makes it uniquely qualified to contribute to the liberation of mankind."

The same phony religious exhortations had been spouted by President William McKinley to justify the Spanish-American war in 1898. The blowing-up of the USS Maine, a job carried out by the war party itself, became the pretext for the colonial war and the hypocrisy that rationalized it: "I am not ashamed to tell you that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance and the Lord heeded the pleas of his servant that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all — Cuba and the Philippines — and educate and uplift them, and by God's grace do the very best we could for them as our fellow men for whom Christ also died." And so their long colonial incarceration began.

The victory over Iraq was supposed to be the high noon of Bush's imperial America. It recalls in certain ways the Battle of Omdurman (1898) that sealed the fate of Egypt and the Sudan. With their Maxim machine guns, the British expeditionary force massacred or wounded about 46,000 of the Mahdi's army of 52,000 with a trifling loss of around 40 British dead. It was a whopping celebration — in the words of Winston Churchill, who participated in that massacre — "of that mechanical scattering of death which the polite nations of the earth (*italics mine*) have brought to such monstrous perfection."<sup>1</sup>

The victories of the empire, shortlived as they are, have been achieved at an appalling price in terms of the loss of

American civil liberties. This was no doubt what Wendell Wilkie meant when he declared in 1942 that "if and when fascism comes to America it will come under the labels of freedom and democracy." To be sure, with the Patriot Act and the avalanche of repressive legislation already on the books with more to come, Wilkie's fears have germinated. A view that blends with the damning verdict of the British philosopher George Monbiot:

"The United States is no longer just a nation. It is now a religion ... American soldiers are no longer merely terrestrial combatants; they have become missionaries. They are no longer simply killing enemies; they are casting out demons ... It is not just that the Americans are God's chosen people; America itself is now perceived as a divine project ... The USA no longer needs to call upon God; it is God, and those who go abroad to spread the light do so in the name of a celestial domain. The flag has become as sacred as the Bible; the name of the nation as holy as the name of God. The presidency is turning into a priesthood."

The 9/11 onslaughts on the Twin Towers had nothing to do with Iraq. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq because none existed; there were no al-Qu'aida links with Iraq because these links had never existed; Iraq did not have any 45-minute timeline for the unleashing of chemical weapons because no such chemical weapons existed. The imbecile nostrum of "liberation" was one of the biggest swindles of all time, perpetrated by a clutch of fanatics that included the Sharonite trio of Wolfowitz, Feith and Perle.

In Blair, the US caste oligarchy found a satellite of unquestioned devotion without whom it would have been impossible to prosecute this war of colonial conquest. At his jackal's best addressing the joint session of the US Congress, and

being honoured with the highest civilian award for his services, Blair declaims: "I feel a most urgent sense of mission about today's world. We are bound together as never before but the danger is disorder." Here he postures as the imperial pacesetter of "law and order". Blair, and it is inconsequential that his political signpost reads Labour or Tory, became a servant-in-waiting because he grasped the bankruptcy of post-imperial Britain since the Suez imbroglio with the confessed recognition that his role could be nothing more than a preferred member of the US imperial servant class.

As part of his global mission to "deliver freedom and prosperity to countries that live in shadows and darkness", it is imperative for a shrunken Britain to align itself with what that prizefighter of imperialism Madeleine Albright called "the indispensable nation," and the big stick that it wields on all and sundry. Nowhere is the abject subservience of Blair so glaring, so abysmally despicable as in his loyalty oath "that it is to America that we must look to lead the charge of the heavy brigades." "Destiny puts you in this place in history, in this moment in time," he beseeched his ecstatic audience. "The task is yours to do ... our job is to be there with you."

It would be difficult to find in the annals of that nation's history such a servile affirmation of his colonial status. Being the Anglican evangelist that he is, his catchphrases remind us of the judgment of Benjamin Disraeli on Ewart Gladstone. "He could convince most people of most things and himself of almost anything." Today, a shrivelled Blair stands as a hapless political dwarf whose political fortunes have been morally dumped into the gutter notwithstanding his retention of his wobbly prime ministership.

Lord Hutton's judicial inquiry may have proved an embar-

rassment for some but in the final countdown it was nothing more than a whitewash to sustain the cohesion of the British ruling class and paper over the cracks of a dire, diseased and inalterably corrupt social and political edifice. It was in no way crucial for the unfolding of the historical drama that spells the withering of Blair and brings the American empire one step closer to its demise. Blair contends that “history will absolve me” — a phrase plagiarized from Fidel Castro’s legendary statement “la historia me absolverá” at the end of his trial oration on 21 September 1953 — for the crimes that he has committed against a defenceless people, but his ability to evoke so flippantly the role of history forgets what history is and is not. On that score, it is apposite to recall the timeless words of Marx. “History does nothing. It possesses no immense wealth. It fights no battles. It is rather man, the real living man who does everything. It is he who possesses power and who fights.”<sup>2</sup>

The presumed suicide of spymaster David Kelly reveals the extent of the debasement, irrationality and incoherence of the political establishment, and the tempest winds tearing through the fabric of imperialism. By the same token, it has given a fillip to the resistance fighters within Iraq and the Middle East.

**T**he end of the war proclaimed on 1 May was the Kiplingesque high point of the grand imperial conquest with the recitation of Bush’s baloney peddled over the last two years. “We do not know the day of final victory, but we have seen a turning of the tide.” The clincher is added that “no act of terrorism will change our purpose or weaken our resolve, or alter their fate. Their cause is lost.” On 9 July, the same arrogant drivel was dribbled out by US

Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld: "We can confidently say that the world is a better place since the US-led coalition triumphed in Iraq." Triumphed?

What the nature of this "triumph" was is evidenced in the brutal new colonial configuration illustrated in the diktat of a Pentagon official to his Syrian counterpart. There was no need for fancy talk: "Iraq is no longer a neighbour of yours because we are the masters of this piece of real estate. The frontier that you have is no longer with Iraq; it is with the government of the United States. You won't be getting anymore subsidized petroleum. You have no friends. You're totally isolated. You're in quarantine and we'll keep you there. If Damascus doesn't walk in step with us there could be a political eruption in Syria. We're telling you simply that your world has changed."

Such is the barefaced bullying lingo of fascism; it is the credo of imperialism whose unique merit is its clarity. Syria, whose territory was bombed by Israel, is demonized as a "terrorist state"; the victim has been metamorphosed into an aggressor, and a regime of sanctions is already in the making. A stunning triumph of the neo-conservatives and their sidekicks, the Israeli and Jewish lobbies. It takes little imagination to see that sanctions and a "regime change" in Syria would bring the predicament of imperialism in the Middle East to a boiling point.

Never perhaps in the history of any conquest has the reversal of fortune been so swift, however, as in Iraq. The body bags and the dead are being shipped home in greater and greater numbers, as the record numbers in October testify. The tremors of fear and chaos are shaking the US caste oligarchy. The white man's media commentariat no longer calls the exclusive shots. For the first time in the

world's history, the views and vision of the oppressed are exhibited with unrivalled power by two Third World media — Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. For this reason they have been hounded and harassed, with several of their correspondents murdered and the quisling politicians demanding they be banned. This is just one more ignominious illustration of the duplicity of all US administrations which preen themselves as the pristine protagonists of freedom — which means the exclusive freedom of the US caste oligarchy's views and interests — but which in reality sedulously reject and cut to shreds any opposing critical comments that challenge their ordained truths or call into question their hegemonic interests.

What the BBC, and the world, call resistance fighters have emerged nationally and conspicuously. "We have a multi-faceted war going on here in Iraq," says US General Ricardo Sanchez, "our troops are being attacked and killed on a daily basis. This is a full-scale guerilla war. The sophistication of the attacks is striking." The partisans are now stigmatized as bandits, gangsters, thugs, terrorists, death squads, bitter-enders, al-Qu'aida agents, relics of a dead regime, etc. Such are the vulgar little caricatures of a wobbling colonial occupation.

The belief that augmenting the numbers of the expeditionary force will stem the tide of resistance is one more illusion. The prophetic words of the victor of Dienbienphu, the legendary General Nguyen Giap, to Robert McNamara, who believed that victory could be attained by pouring more and more men into Vietnam, are a relevant lesson. "McNamara and his advisers," he said, "have raised the number of invaders to around half a million. What are the conse-

quences? They have already had recourse to the widespread use of chemical defoliants [i.e., WMD] and other terrible engines of destruction. Certainly they will boost the number of deaths and impose additional terrible sufferings on our people. It will not, however, loosen the grip of our battle for freedom. It will enhance it. In the end our resistance fighters will triumph." And so it did on 30 April 1975.

The Iraqi resistance is paying a terrible price in terms of repression and torture. In Camp Bucca near Umm Qasr, the regime is resorting to the horrific torture tactics of all occupying colonial powers. And in this sordid enterprise they have been abetted by the so-called "anti-terrorist squads" of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), operating under cover of the American expeditionary force, that have honed their skills to perfection in the torture techniques deployed so ruthlessly in the Palestinian occupied territories. Gone are the days, however, when the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the alibi for the occupation, chanted that victory is just around the corner.

**T**he 25-member Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) is a transparently quisling political force. All of its members are wealthy individuals most of whom have lived outside the country for decades. American millionaire Ahmed Chalabi is illustrative. They are akin to their fellow quislings in the Karzai administration in Kabul. They were handpicked by much the same methods. A CPA official was not letting the cat out of the bag when he said that "they do not have an independent existence. They were created and exist solely as a function of the CPA's requirements." A reflection that succinctly defines for all time the rationale of a puppet regime. The money that has been promised for "reconstruc-

tion" at the Madrid conference in October will inevitably end up in their pockets and foreign banks.

All are apprehensive of the given moment and the ominous black clouds that hang over them night and day. Within a country they once called theirs, they now grovel as internal émigrés. Almost all, with two exceptions, have British, American or Middle Eastern passports. One US Marine charged with 'protecting' them sarcastically quipped, "The bad guys are going after these guys and some of them are going to be skinned. I hope I won't be around when they do the job." Such is the racist contempt of the occupiers for their wards. Another of the quislings' protectors encapsulated the dilemmas of the puppets and the puppet masters: "How in hell can these guys in their limousines believe we can protect them when we can't ensure protection for our own guys?" Indeed, one of their numbers has already fallen victim to the resistance and it would be a miracle if others did not succumb to the same fate.

The occupation is being driven steadily into a defensive stance that consists of barricading themselves within concrete bunkers ringed by barbed wire. In Marine Corps jargon it's labelled "bunkerization". A conditioned reflex against an enemy that is everywhere but nowhere, that strikes unseen when and where he/she so pleases, engendering a sense of impotence. Never have the flames of hatred between the occupier and the occupied been so searing.

At the latest count a minimum of 25 attacks are mounted daily against the occupiers. In this Kafkaesque and panic-stricken milieu, it's no irony that the CPA has awarded a contract to an Arab engineering company to reconstruct all of the 18 underground bunkers most of which were smashed by the invaders' "smart bombs". The universe of bunkerdom

is one of the painful contradictions of American imperialism, a grim reminder of the extent to which the vaunted 'liberators' are now wholly alienated from the objects of their 'liberation'.

Emblematic of this bunkerization is the Viceroy himself, Paul Bremer, a product of the elite Ivy League, Wall Street lawyer, multi-millionaire investment banker and Republican fundraiser. A reborn Christian, like his master in the White House, he begins his daily stint with prayers and Bible reading to solicit divine succour, but obviously providence remains impervious to his pleas. His panic-ridden civilian administration is located in the epicentre of Baghdad in one of Saddam Hussein's appropriated presidential palaces. Enveloped by razor wire, surrounded by tanks and armoured vehicles with the constant overfly of Apache helicopters, studded with every conceivable electronic gimmick, it is the 'home' of 800 employees who pass their lives behind rows upon rows of computers in this stinking air-conditioned ghetto. Leaving the bunker requires special authorization and only with an armed guard.

There are compensations in the form of abundant dirt-cheap supplies of opium shuttled in from Kabul and available in the specially ordered comfort saloons in the Qatar High Command and Kuwait. This is redolent of Vietnam. Not surprisingly, the incidence of suicides, schizophrenia and psychiatric disorders has scaled alarming proportions among these psychologically battered creatures. Most, barring the native translators, are white-skinned non-Arabic speakers. They are cogs in a colonial wheel in a country they despise; ignorant of the culture and language, the geography and, above all, the history of the colony they are working to 'liberate'. For the resistance, this is the milieu in which

payback time has struck.

The targets of the national liberation struggle riding a sharply rising curve are no longer exclusively confined to members of the expeditionary force. In this respect, the partisans' onslaughts bear comparison to the European resistance movement whose targets encompassed the entire swathe of Nazi collaborators. It is against this backdrop that we must firmly grasp the role in Iraq of the United Nations and, specifically, its chief of operations Sergio de Mello, one of the scions of Brazil's wealthiest families.

The demolition of Canal House, seat of the United Nations in Baghdad, is revelatory of the transition from a quantitative to a qualitative leap in the national resistance/liberation movement. It mirrors the speed at which the resistance movement emerged matched by the unconcealed demoralization of the colonial occupation. The death of Ayatollah Bakr-al-Hakim, leading Shia cleric and militant protagonist of the IGC, following swiftly on the heels of the flattening of the Jordanian embassy<sup>3</sup>, epitomized the rising scale of retribution inflicted on the occupation and its handmaidens.

The rumblings of the US debacle are omnipresent. Even within the occupation's inner sanctums in Baghdad and the Command Centre in Qatar, one hears the previously unthinkable subversive question: how long can this hell continue? These three inter-related events transpired at a moment when the occupation is in the throes of profound psychological disarray. This has been followed by the rocketing of the Rashid hotel in which US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, one of the prime conspirators in the invasion, barely escaped by the skin of his teeth.

Compassless in a world it aspires to dominate but whose complexities are beyond its grasp, Washington has no exit

strategy; it has no friends and its frantic bid to curry favour with the United Nations, which it repudiated by its unilateral arrogance, is unlikely to succeed in the servile manner that it expects. The September Big Five Geneva meeting ended once more in a fiasco for the US caste oligarchy, and the General Assembly meeting has merely vindicated the world's loathing and repudiation of its policies of colonial repression and genocide. True, the Security Council in October did give the Bush junta a unanimous vote, but this is an empty gesture, a lollipop, as one Russian diplomat called it. The big four will neither be shovelling money into the occupier's rathole nor sending troops.

Driven like a hounded animal, Bush and his coterie depicted the raid against Canal House as "mass murder against humanitarian workers. These were men and women that were toiling for the building of a new Iraq, providing medical care, and helping with the distribution of food." On the surface, his plausible cries of woe peppered with pious clichés are distant from the euphoric days of "shock and awe". His corporate propaganda contraptions peddled them, as did his political ventriloquist toadies. As with every artifact of American foreign policy, it is Manichean, stripped bare of all nuances. We are in the presence of absolute good and evil with Bush, like St. George, on his white charger galloping against the legions of evildoers. The extent to which the wheel has turned is that what once appeared to the simple-minded as a stirring call to arms is now seen as the whining of a beaten dog.

One of Bush's aides discovers that the occupation after the war is faced with a Second Front. The analogy is apt but its user, as part of the Bush cabal, fails to grapple with its wider implications. Let's refresh his memory. The Second

Front triggered in June 1944 was an act of liberation from Nazi-occupied Europe. The Second Front in Iraq is also a crucial phase in the upsurge of a bludgeoned people battling for their freedom, bent on destroying a colonial occupation whose primary goal is permanent pillage and expropriation of the nation's people and their resources by a predator power located 25,000 km from its shores.

**E**dward Mortimer, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's senior adviser, after going through the usual motions of excoriating what he calls "the terrorists", comes one peg closer to the truth when he says that "whoever planned it [the attack on Canal House] does not want a happy ending to the story of Anglo-American occupation in Iraq." Let's remind Mortimer, an Englishman, that there's no such thing as a "happy ending" to any occupation, whether it be the Nazi occupation of its conquered territories or that of the tragic figure of General Sir Stanley Maude, whose bones are interred in a decrepit padlocked cemetery in east Baghdad.

Happy endings belong to the world of fairytales and fantasists because any occupation, however benign its appearance, remains an intrusive body wholly incompatible with national dignity. The American occupation of foreign lands since merely the end of World War 2, strikingly so in Latin America, Asia, Indochina and now Iraq — as the historical record so pitilessly indicates — is permanently drenched in the blood of millions of its victims.

Mortimer comes to the nub of the matter, however, when he observes that the goal of "the resistance was to demonstrate at all costs that the occupation is not only illegitimate but also futile, and can only lead to disaster." The formulation is correct but calls for certain caveats. What the birth and

gestation of what is already a mighty resistance phalanx pin-point is that the colonial presence is not only “illegitimate”, a designation that is absurdly mild, but rather a horrendous crime against humanity.

Kofi Annan joins the choir of condemnation against “the fanatics and violent people” and adds “that they will not be able to dictate what is happening in Iraq.” There is nothing in the record to indicate that he used such expletives to lambaste the Bush cabal when it perpetrated the foulest of crimes on 20 April and, indeed, before. Cause and effect are inseparable aspects of the dialectics of change.

Who’s doing the “dictating” in Iraq, and in whose interests is the occupation dictating? Let’s be enlightened by Richard Perle, a neo-conservative celebrity and member of Bush’s inner circle. Addressing the American Enterprise Institute, an Israeli-US joint venture, he spells out the goals of the occupation. “We have a responsibility not to turn Iraq over to institutions incapable of seeing this through to a successful conclusion ... the last thing that Iraq needs is French statism and German labour practices.” What it does need obviously, in this perspective, is to shovel the nation’s economic patrimony into the grab bag of transnational corporate ownership and control, notably American, in the shortest span. It would be difficult in a short sentence to find such a compilation of weasel words. Who does the “we” refer to? What does a “successful conclusion” mean? For Perle and his cronies, it is singularly irrelevant and foolish that Iraqis should be the ultimate repository of sovereignty and decision-making. This is diktat in its clearest manifestation, and a reminder to Annan of who is dictating to whom. The Dubai manifesto is proof sufficient.

The goals of imperialism were brazenly exhibited at the

G7 meeting in Dubai in September 2003. The CPA, working through its puppet IGC, showed the extent to which the country had been put on the auction block. The blueprint was unveiled in Dubai where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were holding their annual meetings. The blueprint for the grab of the country's resources was drawn up by both institutions, the US Treasury and three major US investment banks. It was to be the grand triumph of neo-liberalism. Unconditional foreign ownership goes hand in hand with massive tax cuts and tariffs.

It is erroneous to presume, as an editorial in *The Independent* commented, that the American plan to put up Iraq for sale was as insensitive as any of the mistakes made by the occupying powers since the war's end. Let's set the record straight. The goal was corporate conquest and the imperial plunder of the nation's resources, and here we have the perfect neo-liberal blueprint with no frills, no double-talk, no apologetics, no empty refurbished rationalizations. Sentiment and sensitivity have no place in this order of things. The carnivore cannot be turned into a herbivore. The biggest "reconstruction" contracts have been awarded to Halliburton and Bechtel, which are among the largest donors of the Republican party with close connections to US Vice-President Dick Cheney, the Bush dynasty and administration. Viceroy Bremer is on the board of Halliburton. The contracts were awarded behind closed doors with no competitive bids authorized.

Kamel al-Keylani, the IGC's Finance Minister, gives us the vision of undiluted economic liberalism. "The reforms will advance efforts to build a free and open market economy in Iraq and accelerate growth and Iraq's re-entry into the international economy and reintegration with other countries."

As a sop to national and international public opinion, the blueprint excluded oil and natural resources. But this is a fiction, for the goal is the corporate takeover of the world's second largest petroleum reserves, as was done so blatantly by Russian oligarchs in Russia and elsewhere. In short, if the occupation succeeds, these oil reserves will be grabbed lock stock and barrel.

The conquest of Iraq is all about oil. The Persian Gulf countries — Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — produce about 25% of the world's oil and hold 65% of the world's oil reserves. US oil deposits are shrinking rapidly. Over the next 15-20 years, its oil imports will account for around 70% of total domestic demand, hence the impetuous US drive to grab the world's reserves. Present world annual oil consumption is around 25 billion barrels with no signs of deceleration.

"That's why we went to war in Iraq," notes Dr James McKenzie, senior assistant on the climate change programme at the World Resources Institute in Washington, DC, as reported by The Independent. "Gas might have comparable reserves to oil, but it's not in the right place and we don't really have the infrastructure to transport it. We won't run out of oil — but what will happen is that production will decline, and that's when all hell will break loose."

US imperialism has succeeded in grabbing the nation's oil resources, but given the pervasive power of the resistance, they have not and cannot succeed in making the oil flow. As veteran correspondent Robert Fisk has pointed out, it is this factor rather than the daily killings of American invaders that lies behind the Bush administration's mounting panic. "Washington has got its hands on the biggest treasure chest in the world — but it can't open the lid."

Research work in the University of Uppsala claims that oil supplies will peak soon after 2010 with gas supplies swiftly following in its wake, rocketing the price of gasoline and other fuels with potentially disastrous economic consequences. The assessment of Dr McKenzie once again: "We have to accept the fact of oil and gas production peaking. It's not when will we run out, it's when will production be unable to meet demand. And 97-98% of transport depends on it. You can use coal to make methanol to power your cars or buses. But the reality is that it's all about where the oil is." It's for this reason that the vast oil and gas resources can be expected to fall into the grab bag of the mega petroleum giants and their political cronies if and when the conquest of Iraq is consummated. The \$25 billion investment in one of Russia's leading petro giants is a pointer in this direction, with total control as one of its corollaries.

The structure of public-sector ownership and control in Iraq is also slated for demolition. The Central Bank of Iraq will cease to exist as a regulatory body. It will have "full independence" and investors will be granted uninhibited transfer of foreign exchange earnings. Under the new privatization offensive, six foreign banks will be allowed "fast track" entry into the economy and will be permitted full ownership of the local banks within five years. Part of the blueprint is the privatization of everything from electricity and telecommunications to pharmaceutical, textile and engineering firms. This is one of the biggest robberies of all time, driven through in the interests of foreign capitalists and their native sidekicks.

The plan ensures full, immediate remittances to the foreign firms of dividends, interest and royalties. This is the meaning of diktat. As far as agriculture is concerned, all

subsidies and government grants of varying kinds will be slashed and foreign corporations will have access to the uninhibited purchase and sale of land. Such is the vision of liberalization unbounded. This is the dream of the triumph of Cancun if imperialism had not been stymied in its quest for unconditional liberalization, privatization and uninhibited financial flows. This is the model for economic genocide.

**T**he attack against Canal House was not an aberration, but imputable to the UN's role since the onset of the nineties. Let's listen to the testimony of a former senior UN civil servant, Mustapha El Fawzi, a colleague of mine for many years. He was involved in the oil-for-food operations and now scorns the sheer hypocrisy of "humanitarian aid" and the monstrous babble of "humanitarian intervention".

"The US and Britain have been at war with my country non-stop for more than 13 years. It dragooned the UN bureaucracy into toppling our government. The platitude was regime change. It is the US/UN sanctions that generated the genocide that wiped out almost one million of our people. That's the Unicef data. Let's ignore for a moment the numbers butchered during the second war. When asked about this, General Tommy Franks replied that they're not interested in counting those numbers. Our people however will not forget those numbers. They destroyed our factories, our dikes, our public utilities, and our infrastructure. The UN was nothing more than a fig leaf to carry out these atrocities."

This is not a voice in the wilderness by a justifiably grief-stricken patriot but a widespread opinion in the Arab world and in the United Nations secretariat. Likewise, Denis Halliday, former UN Assistant Secretary-General who super-

vised the UN's oil-for-food programme, recognized the extent to which it was riddled with graft, corruption and bad supplies. Distressingly, he added, "the people of Iraq have not forgotten that the UN killed more Iraqis under 13 years of UN sanctions than Bush, Clinton and Bush 2 ever did."

As El Fawzi observed, it was not the UN as an institution with its Charter and its noble ideals that came to be despised by Iraqis but rather the manner in which the country had been bludgeoned with the shameless complicity of certain persons within the highest echelons of the UN's decision-makers. The US/UN duo in this respect, as that of Bremer/de Mello at a personal level, are facets of the same reality. They mirror an identical set of policies in the service of imperial genocide.

Canal House had become, together with the former presidential palace in the centre of Baghdad appropriated by the CPA, the two most striking symbols of a hated alien presence. Canal House was seen not only as a political object of uncompromising revulsion, but also as a super-enclave of privilege: abundant commissariat goods and vegetables flown in daily from Jordan and Kuwait sold at discount prices plus subsidized gasoline, lavish financial perks and the juiciest of per diems for its functionaries. All this at a savage moment in the nation's history when it is wracked by chronic hunger and galloping malnutrition, and 60% of the country's workforce is unemployed, with a further 30% grossly under-employed gasping for its survival in an overcrowded, poverty-stricken informal sector. Investments, which provide the impetus for economic growth, have ground to a halt with the nation on the brink of a catastrophic famine.

Canal House thus came to be evaluated not only as a

repugnant enclave of a hyper-privileged caste of foreign parasites, but as one more boot of the occupation firmly planted in the country's face. Indeed, the word "boot" is now the belligerent designation to portray the tyranny of the occupation. In such an oppressive state, what is the meaning of the rantings of the Bremer/de Mello axis for the promotion of Iraqi sovereignty? Iraqi sovereignty is the victim of a homicide, a corpse that cannot be resuscitated by the white man's magic wands and potions. Rebirth when it does come, as it must and sooner than many of us expect, can only be achieved when the occupation is battered by the resistance and quits. The predator will not easily abandon his prey, and before that happens, regrettably, the blood flows will surge to yet higher levels.

**W**hat precipitated the attack against Canal House, although sooner or later it would doubtless have occurred, was the ramming through in the UN Security Council on 14 August of an American resolution trumpeted as "a great victory" by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. A resolution destined to legitimize the IGC. To extol 14 August as "a great victory", however, is an example of delusional thinking. It was the date that was also the high watermark in de Mello's fatal collusion with US power.

For the resistance, it was the final stick that cracked the camel's back. The bulldozing of that resolution was the signing of de Mello's death warrant. As a boundlessly ambitious apparatchik, he believed, as no doubt others of his breed in Canal House did, that they were flying on angels' wings. Rather, what they had done was to install mechanisms in their skulls to tell them that they were beyond the horrors of a fate they could not divine. Such were the flights of lethal

fancy that shoved them into the purgatory of exterminism.

De Mello was one of the propelling engines behind that resolution. To argue, as some of his well-meaning UN critics fallaciously contended, that he exceeded his mandate is to grossly misapprehend the convolutions of UN power politics, and the personal design and ambitions of the man who was being groomed and marketed by the US State Department and the US delegation to the United Nations as the future Secretary-General. His long service in the UN secretariat was inextricably related with US power. De Mello, we must never ignore, was deeply embroiled with US policies that dismembered Yugoslavia.

He had robustly urged and applauded NATO's bombing of Kosovo and Belgrade. The same team he worked with in Yugoslavia and who partnered his fate was dispatched to Baghdad where they resumed the same trajectory of US/UN political stratagems. De Mello, in short, had become an invaluable asset to be recycled when conditions so dictated. The implosion of the de Mello asset did not, however, signal the end of his utility in perpetuating the sordid cause for which he battled so strenuously. Not surprisingly, his name was promptly put forward by the State Department and the US delegation to the United Nations for the Nobel Peace Prize, whose close imbrications to US policies and pressure require no commentary. His death has been capitalized into a gigantic public relations publicity stunt.

It must be stressed that, stemming from his headlong endorsement of US imperial policies in conjunction with his clones in the UN secretariat, de Mello was in no way, however, an undercover agent, a bedraggled spy 'who came in from the cold'. He was above board. He basked in the lime-light of publicity, luxuriated openly in his US connections

and his espousal of neo-liberalism culminating in the Dubai project. There was no fakery when he flung his ideological trappings in support of American-appointed quislings.

His talks with Bremer were on a daily basis and at times more frequent. They were two peas in a pod, as one Egyptian journalist called them. There was no need for him to dissimulate his intimate affinities with the neo-conservatives whose ideology he embraced, and the Pentagon officials he cultivated that fathered the IGC. The Dubai blueprint for the permanent economic colonization of Iraq which he did not live to see was the fulfillment of his strivings. But that, too, is whistling in the wind.

Several officials of the Arab League which had refused to confer their benediction on the IGC were amazed that he was travelling freely, with his American bodyguards, drumming up support for this quisling rump. Obviously, the resistance, who had studied his personal meanderings and his collaborationist utterances inside and outside the Middle East, were knowledgeable of his pursuits. What many in the UN secretariat deemed his reckless marketeering raises the question: to what extent was he a solitary cavalier or was he acting in concert with Kofi Annan and other leading lights within the UN secretariat, inasmuch as his political and ideological coordinates were known in the secretariat? This is a sordid dossier that future historians will undoubtedly plumb with profit, but whose general outline is quite clear.

It was not only his fulsome embrace of the occupation's policies that was of primordial political significance. Related to his stance was his unabashed hostility to France, Germany and Russia in the Security Council. According to *The Independent*, he argued that "the invasion of Iraq had been justified though no weapons of mass destruction were

found." A stunning acknowledgement that speaks volumes, and that from a senior official of an organization whose Security Council had categorically repudiated giving the green light to such a criminal violation of the Charter.

His enthusiastic reception by US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and Bush at the White House in March — prior to the invasion — would be sequeled by regular visits to the White House and Camp David after the invasion commenced. It was one more insight into his untiring networking within the highest reaches of the perpetrators of this criminal war. The Financial Times was simply reporting the obvious: "He campaigned for international recognition of the IGC in whose formation he played a significant role", a banality that could be engraved on his headstone. To which one might add, in the light of what we already know of de Mello's all-encompassing activities, that it would not be inapt to designate him as a racketeer in the service of American imperialism.

**T**he momentous historical reverberations of the demolition of Canal House will be with us for many years but what can be said with a degree of certainty is that it smashed the nexus between the United Nations and the imperial occupant. The US stranglehold on the UN is not of recent vintage and is one that has tarnished its reputation.<sup>4</sup> It is of course conjectural whether this exposure of what amounts to a criminal connection is an ephemeral phenomenon or something more enduring.

No doubt, the shattering of the Bremer/de Mello axis has set in motion a chain reaction within Iraq and abroad. It has vastly speeded up the demoralization gusting through the ranks of the occupant. The World Bank and the IMF, whose

plans and projects were being orchestrated by the US Treasury Department and the CPA, have bolted to the not-so-green pastures of the Jordanian neo-colony, prompting a British diplomat, under cover of anonymity, to ejaculate that “the rats are fleeing a sinking ship.” The British embassy has slashed its staff to the bone. Most of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have already thrown in the sponge, with the Red Cross the latest exile.

The sweet dreams of US spoliation and easy pickings have metamorphosed into nightmares without end. The predators glibly assumed that oil revenues would pay for the occupation costs and reconstruction. At the same time, the propagandists of the imperial order swore that the war was fuelled by the noblest of human aspirations against an obnoxious tyranny that had nothing to do with such nasty little commodities as oil.

The debacle in Iraq was not an isolated event. It occurred concurrently with the upsurge of the Palestinian resistance movement, the elimination of the US/Israeli-imposed stooge Abu Mazen and the scuttling of the US-conceived “roadmap”; rebuff by North Korea of US demands for unconditional capitulation; and the crash of the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations in Cancun that exposed the dimensions of the double-talk and decadence of an organization whose goal was the peddling of a bogus “free market multilateral trading system.” In the present comatose condition of the WTO, imperialism has lost one of its major pillars of control and domination. The biggest of hoaxes has now crumbled like a cookie.

Increasingly, nevermind the world<sup>5</sup>, the US power oligarchy is isolated in Europe, and the last Security Council resolution does not legitimize the permanent US colonization

of Iraq. The touted “regime changes” in Syria and Iran brandished as the follow-up to the “liberation” of Iraq are nothing more than pipe dreams dispatched to the backburner. This is matched by imperialism’s failure to gain control of the Gulf region and the Middle East. In the Afghan neo-colony, where the opium harvests are hitting record levels, the war against the US occupation and its hirelings rages with no prospects of peace, stability and economic growth.

This brief inventory of calamity has been partnered by the fiasco of the Cancun negotiations that exposed the ballyhoo of the promised paradise of free trade and liberalization. It revealed the depth of the chasm dividing the developed and less-developed segments of global capitalism. In a world capitalist economy bedevilled by overproduction, excess capacity, deflation, anaemic effective demand and beggary-neighbour cutthroat competition of every order, it takes little imagination to grasp that international capitalism is wallowing in a state of delirium tremens. Inter-imperialist rivalries have placed the trans-Atlantic NATO alliance under a terminal strain, with the US shoving in one direction and NATO’s European Union members in an opposed antagonistic direction. No less vital are the afflictions transpiring within the heartland of US finance capitalism.

**T**he tribulations of US imperialism, within and outside Iraq, are being speeded up by the burgeoning convulsions of US capitalism, notwithstanding that the megaterrorist state spends over \$400 billion annually for war and preparations for war, a sum without precedence in the annals of warfare, outstripping the total expenditures of the next 20 countries. This amounts to 44% of our planet’s aggregate war expenditures. Its military presence is implanted in 137

countries. Wolfowitz is hollering for another \$360 million to pursue research and production on special weapons that could be deployed against the Iraqi partisans, and which no doubt would be transferred to the likes of Sharon to pursue his war against the Palestinian resistance.

Yet it should be apparent to all that US capitalism is a colossus with feet of clay, a supplicant mired in dismal financial straits, beseeching, unsuccessfully, all and sundry for handouts to save its already bankrupt skin. It is living on borrowed time and borrowed money. Aggregate costs of the Iraqi aggression now surpass \$1 billion weekly. With interest rate charges thrown in, this number hits \$80 billion yearly or 17% of a bloated budget. A number that does not embrace, in Bush's estimates, the \$87 billion required for so-called "reconstruction". There is only one way of getting this kind of big money and that is by the ruinous policy of printing greenbacks. This fiscal year the budget deficit is expected to exceed \$455 billion, the biggest in US history. The money machine is spiralling out of control.

A figure, which, according to the US Congressional Budget Office, is slated to exceed \$500 billion in 2004. The reversal from surplus to deficit in the past three years — as a share of GDP — is the largest since 1953. The persistence of the non-stop deficit promises to continue into the indefinite future, with a shrivelling of the dollar's value as its corollary. This will inexorably lead to the slashing of national savings, a boost in the foreign debt, a drastic pullback in foreign asset inflows and the hobbling of investment. The deficit's pathology is such that there is little possibility of growing out of it.

As I have shown elsewhere, budget and current-account deficits and ever-rising tides of unstoppable debt continue

to wreak havoc on the diseased financial complex of US capitalism.<sup>6</sup> The same holds for the nation's net asset liabilities (which measures the difference between its foreign liabilities and its foreign assets), growing by 10% annually, rising to 32% of GDP by the end of 2003. Corporate balance sheet debt is one aspect of the abysmal black hole. The far grimmer side of the picture is off-balance sheet debt that has soared sharply over a 30-year period (1973-2003) from 8.6% of GDP to 99% in 2003.

**I**n short, what these sparse numbers spotlight is that the short- and medium-term viability of American capitalism stands precariously on a razor's edge. The relative decline of the American empire was discernible well before 9/11<sup>7</sup>. This process of moral disintegration matched by economic decline has been vastly speeded up by the abortive and criminal invasion of Iraq executed as the starting point for the redrawing of the map of the Middle East. An objective that was coupled to the annexationist designs of the corporate gulag for enhanced profits and fatter market shares.

Its goal, as we've said, was to grab access to and control of the region's vast petroleum and natural resources with the complicity of a clutch of UN collaborators. The plans of empire and permanent colonization have gone awry, however, symptomatic of the dire straits of imperialism. In this respect, the sustained ferocity of the Iraqi resistance/liberation struggle is an anti-imperialist detonator of Promethean force.

## ENDNOTES

1 Quoted in Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, New York, 2003.

2 Marx-Engel's *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol.1.

3 Jordan is a client state that receives an annual US handout of \$2.2 billion. It served as a major logistical, supply and intelligence-gathering point against Iraq.

4 As a permanent senior official in the UN secretariat for many years, I witnessed at first hand the insidious and toxic penetration of US corporate and blatant political peddling. For a massively documented study of this penetration, see Phyllis Bennis, *Calling the Shots: How Washington Dominates Today's UN*, New York, 2002.

5 Richard Bernstein summarizes the shift in global opinion: "In the two years since September 11, 2001, the view of the United States as a victim of terrorism that deserved the world's sympathy and support has given way in the months after the war in Iraq to a widespread vision of America as an imperial power that has defied world public opinion in an unjustified and unilateral use of military force." *New York Times*, 11 September 2003.

6 Frederic F. Clairmont, *USA: The Crumbling of Empire*, Citizens International Press, Penang, 2003.

7 Frederic F. Clairmont, *The Rise and Fall of Economic Liberalism: The Making of the Economic Gulag*, Southbound Press, Penang, 1996.