

Sovereignty & the State

Not Another Editorial!

Fifth Estate Collective

2004

Meet the New Boss

When US occupation authorities pretended to return sovereignty to Iraq, they erected a pliable government of quisling-proxies. To cover up the devastating failure of the invasion, they created a mirage of Iraqi independence.

During a secret ceremony in a heavily-militarized bunker buried somewhere in the Green Zone, there were no Iraqis present other than the new puppets; only Western news media, US military officers, and armed mercenary bodyguards were allowed to attend.

After this insincere diplomatic protocol, proconsul Paul Bremer quickly boarded an airplane and bolted out of Baghdad like someone working the old dine-and-dash restaurant scam. Shortly thereafter, former contra mastermind John Negroponte arrived to take up the post of US “ambassador” to Iraq, a job whose duties he will surely perform with the same relish he had as an “ambassador” during the worst of the Reagan-Bush secret wars in Central America.

The new prime minister of Iraq is Iyad Allawi, a wealthy British neurologist who used to be a loyal member of the Ba’ath Party’s inner circle and a trusted aide of Saddam Hussein. Allawi has been described by his US government backers as a “democratically-minded strongman,” a term that we used to hear in reference to Ngo Dinh Diem, the aristocratic, nepotistic Catholic despot who ran the South Vietnamese police state before the Kennedy Administration terminated his employment and put a contract out on him. Like Diem, Allawi’s limited credibility soon evaporated when he publicly endorsed US military assaults against civilian populations.

Anxious to declare martial law, Allawi has locked down the media with censors and propagandists formerly employed by Saddam’s Ministry of Information. He has organized secret police security agencies staffed with ex-Ba’athist “specialists” and reinstated the death penalty against insurgents. In mid-June, Allawi personally executed six unarmed, blindfolded, and handcuffed prisoners in a Baghdad police station. He has ordered police raids against “criminal elements” in the slums of Baghdad and blames the violence and chaos besetting the city on the hardened criminals that Saddam Hussein released from jail just prior to the invasion. Allawi believes, as all statist do, that packing prison cells will bring peace, happiness and prosperity to the nation.

A State-of-the-Art Failed State

Once again, the history of the Vietnam War is informative to what has happened in Iraq: the June 28 “transfer of power” called to mind those days in 1969 when Nixon vowed to “Vietnamize” the US war in Southeast Asia, to turn everything over to their South Vietnamese partners so that the US could fully extract itself from the conflict (to see how well that worked, check your history books). By pledging to “sovereignize” Iraq, the US is trying the same stunt. And there are other precedents offering an instructional template for the disaster of Occupied Iraq.

Consider the so-called autonomy given to provinces in western Tibet by Communist China in 1965 following the awful military intervention of 1959, or, better yet, the example of East Germany.

In the mid-1950s, following nearly a decade of military, political, and economic occupation, the Soviet Union granted sovereignty to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). No one was naive enough to be fooled by that one either. Iraq is just as assuredly a US satellite and will remain part of its hegemonic bloc until the US collapses as the USSR did starting in 1989. In the case of East Germany and Iraq those involved overlooked a crucial set of facts: sovereignty cannot be “given” or “handed over,” only asserted, established and maintained.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell laid out this situation with clarity when he explained to a reporter that “some of that sovereignty” that the US is handing over to Iraq is going to be given back; “they are going to allow us to exercise [it] on their behalf,” he said with a straight face.

Would Allawi’s Saddam-without-the-mustache dictatorship keep the lid on the insurrections until mid-November, at which time the invaders could go back to being more obvious about acting as a military occupation force? The sovereignty scheme was supposed to take the heat off of Bush and Cheney as they wheedled, lied, and fear-mongered their way across the US this summer and fall.

If any problems did arise in Iraq in the meantime, the press would be directed to speak with representatives of Allawi’s government, not Bush’s. US troops were ordered to stay off of the streets, button down their bases, and avoid firefights to keep casualty figures from mounting. As Negroponte lurks behind the stage curtains in Saddam’s palace in the Green Zone and refuses to give interviews, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, once the object of a war-celebrity cult arising from his constant appearances in network news coverage, has been muzzled and ordered back into the shadows for the time being.

As part of this sleazy sleight of hand, other news stories are hyped, like the dire need for a Constitutionalized “defense” of marriage and the creeping dread of Code Orange terrorist warnings. If enough heat can be generated by these dead-end topics, they will appear on the front page and at the top of the broadcast, thereby pushing what little critical coverage there is of the Iraq debacle even further to the margins of public consciousness. Literally, the lead story the other night on a local news broadcast was the centenary anniversary of the invention of the banana-split sundae.

In our opinion, there is no such thing as a “legitimate” government, and there is certainly nothing “fake” about the cruel implementation of state sovereignty going on these days in Iraq. There can be no authentic, meaningful, autonomous sovereignty in Iraq so long as there is a state of any kind there. But that does not mean that we support the rise of patriarchal, reactionary tribal councils stepping in to fill the void left by imploding national identities.

The only kinds of “legitimate” Iraqi sovereignty that we recognize are things like the illegal wildcat strikes by petroleum workers’ councils in Basra; the continuing self-organization of the unemployed throughout the country into mutual aid unions; the networks of informal protection and resources set up by neighborhood women for themselves and their children; and efforts initiated by Kurdish anarchists to derail the bloody locomotive of nationalism in northern Iraq with ideas of internationalist solidarity.

The Return of the Repressed

We here at *Fifth Estate* refuse to partake in the Big Forgetting currently underway. FE has published collective editorial statements against the war in Iraq in every issue since Fall 2002. Granted, these tracts have been a cluttered mix of research, analyses, predictions, descriptions, calls to action and, to be sure, a few spittle-flecked rants.

Yet regardless of their rhetorical tone, these collective statements are meant to keep the issues surrounding the invasion of Iraq in the forefront, to try to keep readers grounded in the struggle against the war and the scoundrels and sociopaths who planned it and profit from it. In the name of freedom, we urge all to remember the abominations of this war despite the blizzard of distractions, fatigue, fright, and feelings of powerlessness.

The war in Iraq continues, and it continues to matter. In the last few months, though, we’ve noticed some anarchist comrades and companeros sneering at stubborn anti-war positions like ours. Since anti-war sentiment in America is so widespread, it must be mild in its tone and reformist in its goal, they reason.

The typical grumble is that the Iraq War is a fait accompli and a movement against it diverts energies better served elsewhere. Certainly, we recognize that the war has forced us to spend too much energy and time fighting against it both in the pages of FE and out in the streets. While our sacrifices are ridiculously small when compared to the bone-crushing miseries of others, we still resent that this war is stealing resources from us that we'd rather put to use in our own locales or for our lovers, our siblings, and our children. We all would rather be working on positive, pro-active projects in our own communities—hell, for that matter, we'd rather be sipping more iced tea, reading more poetry, skinny-dipping in more abandoned quarries, tending to more of our tomatoes, and sleeping late with more of our friends. But we cannot.

We must stay involved in anti-war, anti-occupation, and anti-imperialist struggles, keep the war from being eclipsed by the postured electioneering of presidential campaigns, and radically sharpen the struggle to the concerns of anarchists, anti-statists, and anti-authoritarians. These perspectives need to be reclaimed and reinforced, not swept under the rug.

As always, against all wars and all states,
The *Fifth Estate* Collective

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