

the revolution and installing a new puppet government in Baghdad.

Three factors forced Washington to abandon that plan in 1958: 1) The sweeping character of the Iraqi Revolution; 2) The announcement by the United Arab Republic, which bordered Iraq, that its forces would fight the imperialists if they sought to invade; and, 3) The emphatic support of the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union for the revolution. The USSR began a mobilization of troops in the southern Soviet republics close to Iraq.

The combination of these factors forced the U.S. leaders to accept the existence of Iraqi Revolution. But Washington never really reconciled itself to the loss of Iraq.

Over the next three decades, the U.S. applied many tactics designed to weaken and undermine Iraq as an independent country. At various times, like after Iraq completed the nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company in 1972 and signed a defense treaty with the USSR, the U.S. gave massive military support to right-wing Kurdish elements fighting Baghdad and added Iraq to its list of "terrorist tates."

The U.S. supported the more rightist elements within the post-revolution political structure against the communist and left-nationalist forces. For example, the U.S. applauded the suppression of the Iraqi Communist Party and left-led trade unions by the Ba'ath Party government of Saddam Hussein in the late 1970s.

In the 1980s, the U.S. encouraged and helped to fund and arm Iraq in its war against Iran. U.S. domination of the latter was ended by Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. In reality, though, the U.S. aim in the Iran-Iraq war was to weaken and destroy both countries. Ex-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger revealed the real U.S. attitude about the war: "I hope they kill each other."

The Pentagon provided Iraq's air force with satellite photos of Iranian targets. At the same time, as the Iran-Contra scandal revealed, the U.S. was sending anti-aircraft missiles to Iran.

The Iran-Iraq war was a disaster, killing a million people and weakening both countries.

## THE COLLAPSE OF THE USSR AND THE GULF WAR

When the war finally ended in 1988, developments

in the Soviet Union were posing a new and even graver danger to Iraq, which had a military and friendship treaty with the USSR. In pursuit of "permanent détente" with the U.S., the Gorbachev leadership in Moscow began to cut its support for its allies in the developing world.

In 1989, Gorbachev went further and withdrew support for the socialist governments in Eastern Europe, most of which then collapsed. This sharp shift in the world relationship of forces -- culminating with the collapse of the Soviet Union itself two years later -- constituted the greatest victory for U.S. imperialism since the Second World War.

It also opened the door for the U.S. war against Iraq in 1991, and more than a decade of sanctions/blockade and bombing which have devastated Iraq and its people.

Today, the Bush administration is seeking to win public support for a new war against Iraq by talking about "weapons of mass destruction" and "human rights." The reality is that Washington in concerned about neither Iraq's diminished military capacity nor human rights anywhere in the world.

What is moving U.S. policy toward Iraq in 2002 is the same objective that motivated Washington 80 years ago: Oil.

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# The U.S. and Iraq In Historical Perspective

By **Richard Becker**

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How and why did U.S. involvement in Iraq begin? In all the countless hours of "coverage" (i.e. propaganda) which the corporate media devotes to broadcasting the Bush administration's lies and deceit about Iraq, that simple and crucial question is almost never addressed. And for good reason.

Since its very beginning eight decades ago, U.S. policy toward Iraq has been intensely focused on one objective: Taking control of that country's rich oil resources.

The roots of U.S. intervention in Iraq lie in the aftermath of World War I, a war between capitalist empires. On one side were the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman (Turkish) Empires; on the other side was the British-French-Russian imperial entente. Most of the Middle East was under Ottoman control.

The British, through their agent, T.E. Lawrence, known to Hollywood moviegoers as "Lawrence of Arabia", promised Arab leaders that if they fought with Britain against their Turkish rulers, the British would support the creation of an independent Arab state after the war.

At the same time, the British, French and Russian foreign ministries were signing the secret Sykes-Picot

agreement. Sykes-Picot re-carved the Middle East. The agreement was made public after the Russian Revolution of 1917 by the Bolshevik party, who denounced it as imperialist.

Mass revolts broke out all over the Middle East when the Arab and Kurdish peoples discovered their betrayal at the hands of the imperial "democracies," and the rebellions continued throughout the colonial period. Repression was brutal in the extreme. In 1925, for instance, the British dropped poison gas on the Kurdish town of Sulaimaniya in Iraq, the first time that gas was deployed from warplanes.

After the war ended in 1918, Britain and France proceeded with their plans. Lebanon and Syria, they agreed, would be incorporated into the French Empire, while Palestine, Jordan and the two southern provinces of Iraq, Baghdad and Basra, would become part of the far-flung British Empire.

What they didn't agree about was who would get Mosul province, the northern area of present-day Iraq. According to the Sykes-Picot accord, it was part of the French "sphere of influence."

The British were determined, however, to add Mosul, which was mainly Kurdish in population, to its new Iraq colony. To back its claim, the British army occupied Mosul four days after the Turkish surrender in Oct. 1918 and never left.

The resolution of the inter-imperialist struggle between Britain and France over Mosul brought with it the beginning of the U.S. role in Iraq.



The importance of Mosul to the big powers was based on its known, but as of then largely undeveloped oil resources. The United States had entered the first world war on the side of Britain and France in 1917, after both its allies and enemies were largely exhausted. The U.S. conditions for entering the war included the demand that its economic and political objectives be taken into account in the post-war world. Among those objectives was access to new sources of raw materials, particularly oil.

In Feb. 1919, Sir Arthur Hirtzel, a top British colonial official, warned his associates: "It should be borne in mind that the Standard Oil Company is very anxious to take over Iraq." (quoted in Peter Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, 1914-32, London, 1974)

In the face of the British-French domination of the region, the U.S. at first demanded an "Open Door" policy; i.e. that U.S. oil companies should be allowed to freely negotiate contracts with the new puppet monarchy of King Faisal, whom the British had installed on the throne in Iraq.

The solution to the conflict over Iraq among the victorious allies was found by dividing up Iraq's oil. The British kept Mosul as part of their new Iraq colony.

### **U.S. GETS CUT OF IRAQI OIL AS PAYOFF FOR ROLE IN FIRST WORLD WAR**

Iraq's oil was split five ways: 23.75% each to Britain, France, Holland and the U.S., with the remaining 5% going to an oil baron named Caloste Gulbenkian, known as "Mr. Five-Percenter," who helped negotiate the agreement.

Exactly 0% of Iraq's oil belonged to Iraq, and that's how it was to stay until the revolution of 1958.

In 1927, major oil exploration got underway, with huge deposits discovered in Mosul province. Two years later, the Iraqi Petroleum Company, comprised of Anglo-Iranian (today British Petroleum), Shell, Mobil and Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon), was set up, and within a few years totally monopolized Iraqi oil production.

During the same period, the al-Saud family, with Washington's backing, conquered much of the neighboring Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia came into being in the 1930s as a neo-colony of the U.S. The U.S. embassy in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, was located in the ARAMCO (Arab American Oil Co.) building.

But the U.S. oil companies and their government in

Washington weren't satisfied. They wanted complete control of the Middle East's oil, just as they had a near-monopoly of the Western Hemisphere's petroleum reserves. This meant displacing the British, who were still the top dog in the region.

The U.S. opportunity came as a result of WW II. While the U.S. and British are generally depicted as the closest of war-time allies, the fact is that they were at the same time fierce opponents.

The war greatly weakened the British Empire both at home and in the loss of key colonies in Asia. In the early stages of the war, 1939-42, it was a question whether Britain would survive, and it was never to fully recover its former dominance.

The U.S., on the other hand, grew increasingly powerful throughout the war (which the Washington rulers had once again bided their time before entering).

In the latter stages of WW II, the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, dominated by big banking, oil and other corporate interests, were determined to restructure the post-war world so as to ensure the dominant position of the United States.

The key elements in their strategy were: 1) U.S. military superiority in nuclear and conventional weaponry; 2) U.S.-dominated corporate globalization, using the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, created in 1944, and the establishment of the dollar as the world currency; and 3) Control of global resources and particularly oil.



While the fighting was still raging on the battlefields, a behind-the-scenes struggle for global economic control was unfolding between the U.S. and Britain. So intense was this battle, that on March 4, 1944 (three months before the D-Day invasion at Normandy), British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a message to President Franklin Roosevelt that was unusual

in its imperialist content and hostile tone:

"Thank you very much for your assurances about no sheeps eyes [looking enviously on-RB] our oilfields in Iran and Iraq. Let me reciprocate by giving you the fullest assurance that we have no thought of trying to horn in upon your interests or property in Saudi Arabia. My position in this as in all-matters is that Great Britain seeks no advantage, territorial or otherwise as a result of this war. On the other hand she will not be deprived of anything which rightly belongs to her after having given her best services to the good cause -- at least not so long as your humble servant is entrusted with the conduct of her affairs." (quoted in Kolko, The Politics of War, New York, 1968)

What this note clearly showed was that the U.S. leaders were so intent on taking over Iran and Iraq, both important neo-colonies of Britain, that it had set off alarm bells in British ruling circles.

Despite Churchill's bluster, there was nothing the British could do to restrain rising U.S. power. Within a few years, the British ruling class would adapt to the new reality and accept its new role as the U.S.'s junior partner.

### **U.S. ROLE EXPANDS AFTER WW II**

In 1953, following the CIA coup that put the Shah (king), in power, the U.S. took control of Iran. By the mid-1950s, Iraq was jointly controlled by the U.S. and Britain.

Washington set up the Baghdad Pact in 1955, which included their client regimes in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Iraq, along with Britain. The Baghdad Pact, or CENTO-Central Treaty Organization, had two purposes: First, to oppose the rise of Arab and other liberation movements in the Middle East and south Asia; and, second, to be another in a series of military alliances - NATO, SEATO and ANZUS were the others -- encircling the socialist camp of the Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe, north Korea and north Vietnam.

Iraq, the center of CENTO, was only independent in name. The British maintained their military airfields in Iraq. While the country was extremely rich in oil -- 10% of the world's reserves -- the people lived in extreme poverty and hunger. Illiteracy was over 80%. There was one doctor for every 6,000 people; one dentist for every 500,000.

Iraq was ruled by a corrupt monarchy under King Faisal II and a coterie of feudal landowners and merchant capitalists.

Underlying Iraq's poverty was the simple fact that Iraq did not own its vast oil reserves.

### **THE IRAQ REVOLUTION OF 1958**

But on July 14, 1958, Iraq was rocked by a powerful social explosion. A military rebellion turned into a country-wide revolution. The king and his administration were suddenly gone, the recipients of people's justice.

Washington and Wall Street were stunned. In the week that followed, the New York Times, the U.S. "newspaper of record," had virtually no stories in its first ten pages other than those on the Iraqi Revolution.

While another great revolution that took place just six months later in Cuba is better remembered today, Washington regarded the Iraqi upheaval as far more threatening to its vital interest at the time.

President Eisenhower called it "the gravest crisis since the Korean war." The day after the Iraqi revolution, 20,000 U.S. Marines began landing in Lebanon. The day after that, 6,600 British paratroopers were dropped into Jordan.

This was what came to be known as the "Eisenhower Doctrine;" the U.S. would intervene directly -- go to war -- to prevent the spread of revolution in the vital Middle East.



The U.S. and British expeditionary forces went in to save the neo-colonial governments in Lebanon and Jordan. Had they not, the popular impulse from Iraq would have surely brought down the rotten dependent regimes in Beirut and Amman.

But Eisenhower, his generals and his arch-imperialist Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, had something else in mind, as well: Invading Iraq, overturning