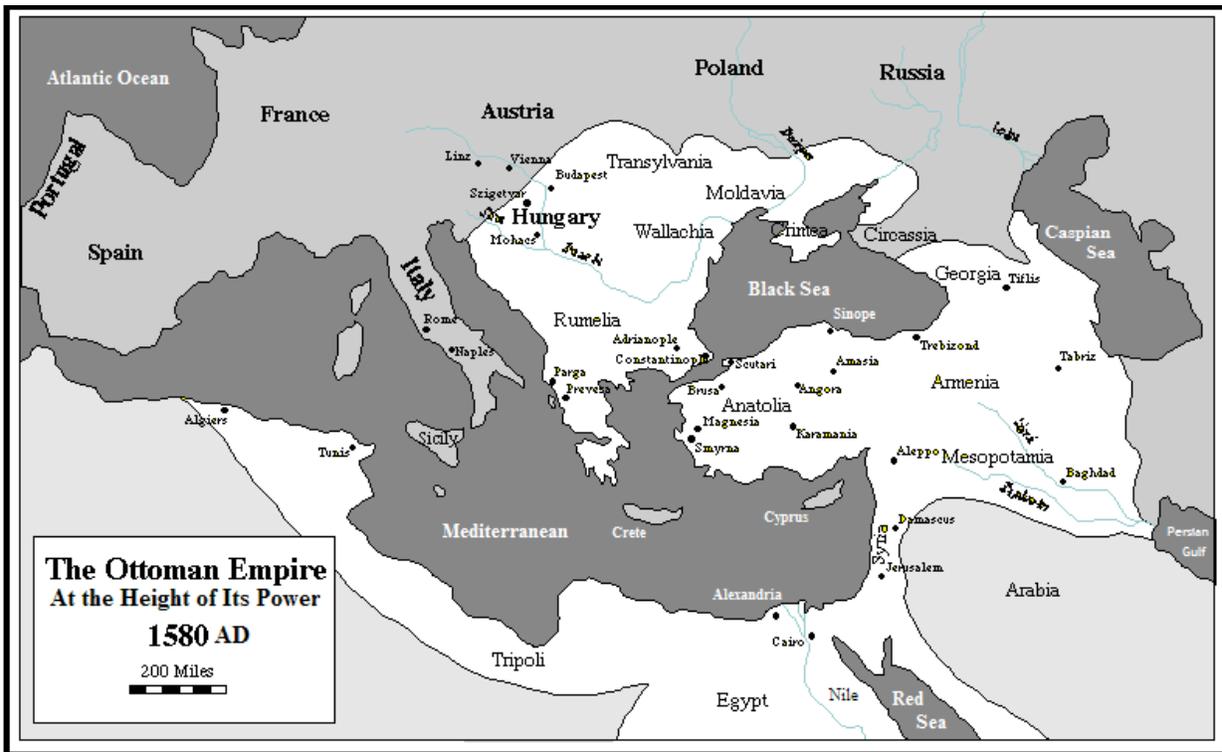


Iraq

This pamphlet aims to tell at least a part of the history of Iraq in order to prove a few important points: Iraq is an old civilization with a people who have fought for their freedom and to have a better life for themselves and their children. The working class in Iraq has a proud tradition of struggle against foreign domination and exploitation by the Iraqi ruling classes. The current war is being fought by U.S. imperialism for control of a key resource: Oil. This war is part of a broader struggle for domination of the world's resources by the capitalists. The military operations in Iraq, as well as Afghanistan, have resulted in a huge waste of human life and damage to these societies. And finally if we want to end war, we have to put an end to the system that creates war -- capitalism.



Modern Iraq



Some Facts About Iraq

Iraq is a country in the Middle East north of the Persian Gulf, about the size of the state of California. It is mostly desert, but the area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is a fertile plain. The northern region is mountainous.

The population of the country is about 25 million people. The majority are Arabs (75 percent), but the country is also home to Kurds (15 percent) as well as Assyrians, Turkmen and other minority ethnic groups (five percent). Of these, 97 percent are Muslim and three percent are Christian. Around 60 percent of Muslims in Iraq are Shi'a, and 40 percent are Sunni. The majority of the Kurds, who are mostly Sunni Muslims, live in the mountains in the north. Shi'ite Muslims are more prominent in the south, where that religious current was founded. People of all religious traditions are found, to some extent, amongst all ethnic groups and in all regions.

Iraq is the site of ancient Mesopotamia, one of the earliest human civilizations, which developed extensive agriculture and built some of the first cities 7,000 years ago. The Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian empires, which developed in Mesopotamia, set down some of the first writings in science, math, law, and philosophy. For this reason Iraq is known as the “Cradle of Civilization”.

In the eighth century, the city of Baghdad was established at the heart of the newly formed Islamic empire founded by the Prophet Mohammed. At its height it included the land from Spain to modern-day Iran. Baghdad was then a center of science and philosophy, home to great thinkers such as Ibn Sina, the father of modern medicine.

Between the 16th century and the early 20th century, Iraq was a part of the Ottoman Empire. Iraq was a province or state within Ottoman imperial territory. The Ottoman Empire stretched from North Africa to the Balkans. It was one of the world's superpowers between the 13th and 17th centuries. It was at the crossroad between Europe and Asia. This made it the trading center with Europe and Africa for the products of the Chinese Empire.

The Ottoman Empire lost its dominant position in the world when Europe's capitalist revolution took off in the 1700s. From that point until the Empire's fall in 1918, as a result of World War I, the European powers tried to dominate the Ottoman Empire.

The Curse of Oil

Until the early 20th century, most of Iraq was considered a worthless desert by the European powers. Iraq's cities and farmlands were regionally important, but not very important in the world economy. This changed after 1908. The discovery of large oil deposits made Iraq one of the most desirable territories in the Middle East. In 1908, the British Navy converted from coal to oil-based fuel. The world was on its way to an oil-based economy and the great imperial powers began to struggle to dominate the oil reserves of the world. In 1912, a British-dominated consortium, the Turkish Petroleum Company, was founded to develop an oil industry in and around Iraq.

In 1914, during World War I, in an effort to resist British domination, the Ottoman Empire made an alliance with the Germans and fought on the side of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria against the French, British, and Russians. After the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the British invaded southern Iraq. They feared that the Ottomans would threaten the oil fields that they were also developing in Iran. The invasion of southern Iraq by the British led to an all-out occupation of the country. The British saw an occupation of Iraq as a way to ensure their hold over the oil of the Persian Gulf region. By the end of the war in 1918, the British forces controlled the territory of Iraq up to the northern city of Mosul.

During the war, the British tried to secure alliances with forces within the Ottoman Empire in order to undermine Ottoman military strength. In 1914, the British made a deal with the local ruler or sheik of Kuwait, located in the south of Iraq. The British agreed to recognize him as an independent ruler of the Kingdom of Kuwait under British protection in exchange for his support for British military operations.

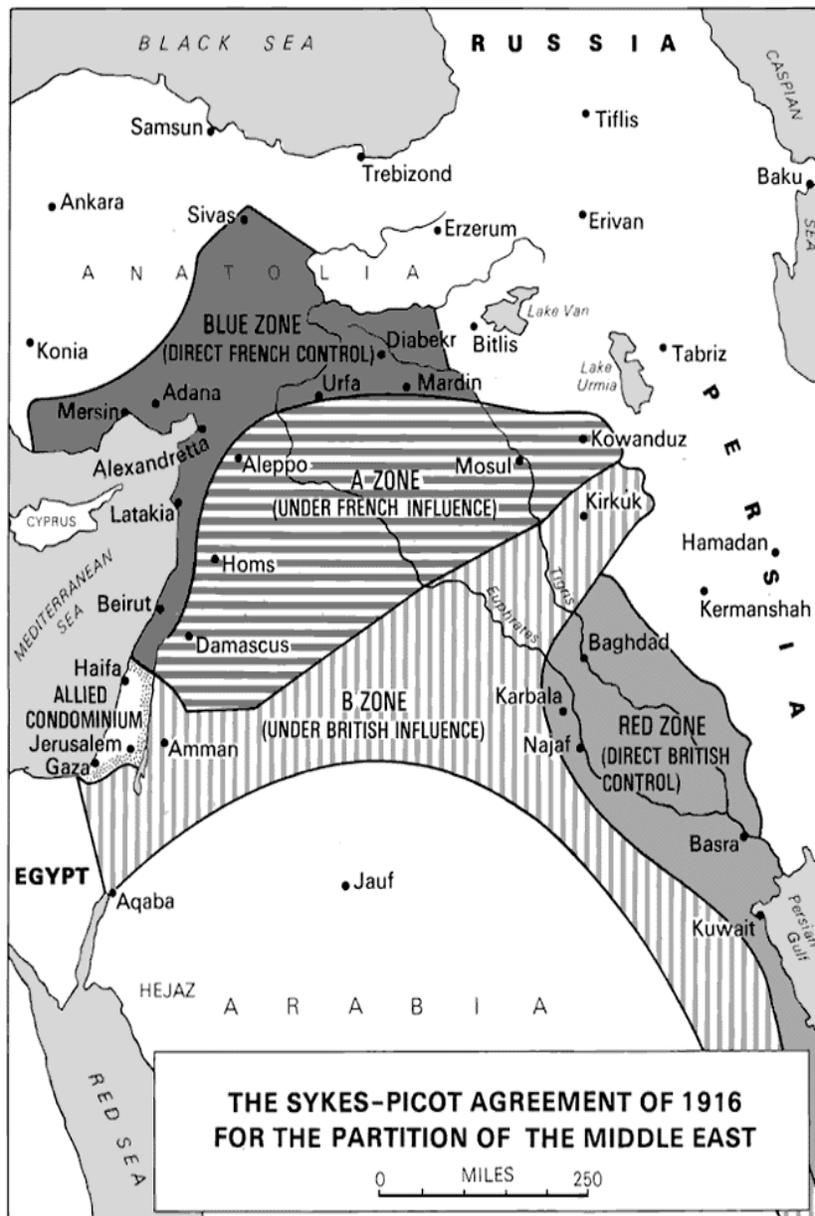
In 1915, the British made a similar deal with the Governor of Mecca, Sharif Husayn. Husayn agreed to start a revolt of the Arabs against the Ottoman government in exchange for an independent Arab kingdom after the war. The planned revolt involved a number of Iraqi officers in the Ottoman army who hoped to win British support for an independent Iraqi state. In 1916, Husayn and his son Faisal led a military campaign against the Ottomans. By the end of the war, Faisal's forces captured Damascus, the capital of current day Syria.

Artificial Borders

World War I ended in 1918. Already in 1916, the victorious countries, France and Britain, had arrived at the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which carved up the Middle East after the war. What used to be economically and culturally integrated regions of the Ottoman Empire, were turned into separate countries, under the domination of the European occupiers. This system was solidified by a meeting of France and Britain, in the newly established League of Nations in 1920 at San Remo, Italy. The Arab Peninsula was divided into a series of "mandates". According to the League of Nations, mandated territory was "subject to the rendering of advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone." By "advice and assistance", the League meant writing the laws, choosing the people who govern, and controlling the resources of the country. And of course, it is the occupiers and not the occupied people who would get to decide when the mandates "are able to stand alone". France would receive a mandate to govern the region of Syria and Lebanon. Britain would receive a mandate to control Iraq and Jordan.

Palestine was a mandate officially belonging to all the victorious powers, but actually dominated by the British.

The system of mandates set up by the Sykes-Picot Agreement was just an attempt to give a cover for colonial domination. The occupiers tried to win political support at home, and around the world by paying lipservice to the idea that people in the Middle East had a right to govern themselves. The British and French imperialists claimed their occupation was going to bring democracy and economic progress to the occupied peoples. This was a colonial mentality with racist underpinnings, which assumed that the people of the Middle East are unable to govern themselves, and so they need the more-civilized Europeans to teach them.



In 1920, Faisal, who had led the Arab Revolt, still controlled the city of Damascus in modern Syria. He rejected the decision of the British and French to carve up the Arab Peninsula. Instead, Faisal declared the independent Arab Kingdom of Syria (which included modern Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan). He also called for an independent Iraq to join in partnership with the Arab Kingdom of Syria.

The British went back on their agreement with Faisal and Sharif Husayn to set up an independent Arab state. The French wanted to rule Syria, and the British needed French support because they couldn't control the Arab Peninsula themselves. They let the French seize Lebanon and Syria by force, and the Arab Kingdom fell to French guns in 1920.

In Iraq, the new colonial system angered the population. It had become clear to Iraqi Arabs that "mandate" meant colonial control. Mass demonstrations broke out across the country. The Kurdish tribes of the north rebelled against the British occupation of Mosul, while Sunni and Shi'a in central and southern Iraq held joint meetings at their mosques to mobilize demonstrations. The British mandate resulted in an outpouring of national feeling, which cut across religious and ethnic lines. People were unified in calling for the occupiers to leave.

The British sent Royal Air Force bombers and troops armed with mustard gas to suppress the Iraqi rebellion. The British forces slaughtered 10,000 Iraqis, mostly civilians. The uprising was proof to the British government that Iraq was ungovernable by direct British occupation. They tried instead to use a sly diplomatic trick to try to control the situation.

The British wanted to find someone who could control the country for them. They decided to offer the title of King of Iraq to the exiled Faisal Husayn, the leader of the Arab Revolt. Faisal had been the leader of the revolt against the Ottoman Empire, and the founder of the Arab Kingdom. People regarded him as a symbol of Arab and Iraqi independence. As a Syrian however, he had no direct ties to the landlords who were Iraq's most powerful organized political force. Faisal's lack of a base of support made him perfect for the British to use as their pawn.

Faisal insisted upon an independent status for Iraq. The British were willing to play along, provided the so-called independence didn't really mean much. The Treaty of 1922 established permanent British control of Iraqi military affairs, internal security, and the economy. Iraq's independence, granted by the British colonizer, was nothing but legal fiction. The League of Nations continued to refer to Iraq as a mandate.

Under Faisal, Iraq's system of government was supposedly a constitutional monarchy, where the king would hold limited power, and the majority of decisions would be made by a democratically elected parliament. The new Iraq was designed to "look like" a democratic country. But like Iraq's independence, this outward appearance had little to do with real democratic control by the population over its own affairs.

The British made alliances with the traditional tribal elite. Real power was in the hands of tribal elders who were also big landowners. As of 1925, the Iraqi state army had 15,000 rifles for its army while the tribal militias possessed 100,000 rifles. The militias were thus the only real military organization in the country. This enabled the tribal landlords to make sure that their parliamentary representatives enacted the policies they wanted. Under their control, the state spent very little money on urban development, industry, and education; nothing to improve the lives of the peasants and workers.

The courts continued to be administered by the ulama, the traditional Islamic priesthood. Therefore law was based on Islam. Because the majority of Iraq was divided into Sunni and Shi'a sects of Islam, there were two different legal systems, rather than one universal system for everybody. This separated the society along religious lines and made it easier for the landlords and the British to control it by playing one group off against the other.

In the 1920s, the United States brokered a deal with Britain for a so called "Open Door" policy. Iraq's oil was split amongst U.S., French, British, and Dutch companies. Companies such as

Shell, Mobil, Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon), Anglo-Iranian (today British Petroleum) collaborated to exploit the oil. This was the beginning of the U.S. interest and involvement in Iraqi affairs.

The Growth of Iraqi Nationalism

The 1920s and 1930s, saw a growth of nationalist political consciousness among the Iraqi army officers. The army was urban and had been educated in European schools or by European teachers imported to Iraqi technical schools. The officers saw their country dominated by the British and being held back in its development by the landlord class. They wanted to see their country developed and modernized. They wanted schools, industry, roads and railways. They wanted to break the hold of the British and their traditional elite allies, and take state power themselves. With these goals in mind, the officers began to organize politically within the army. Ultimately the army officers were hoping to play the role that the capitalist class had played earlier in the development of modern European states. They wanted to use the state to develop the means of production along modern industrial capitalist lines, and do away with the old system of traditional landlordism. They wanted to become the new, ruling, capitalist class.

The Growing Working Class & the Misery of the Peasants

In the 1930s, another opposition to the traditional landlord elite arose in the form of the working class and poor peasants. The development of the oil economy, and the state support for the traditional landholders, led to a severe crisis for the poor peasants and workers. The landholding elite pushed the peasants into poverty. Concentration of land ownership created a huge population of landless peasants who became destitute unemployed workers in the cities. To solve the social crisis, the state would have had to divide the land amongst the landless and small peasants. Dividing the land would give peasants a better standard of living and a stake in producing more food for the market. The state was controlled by the landlords. In addition, the state was never lacking in funds. In return for keeping things running smoothly in Iraq, the state received payoffs from European and American oil corporations. This meant that the state did not rely on the population for taxes. The state therefore had no interest at all in responding to the needs of the peasants and poor workers.

Workers received the bare minimum in pay, and worked under brutal conditions in the oil, railway, and construction industries, centered around the oil economy. Exploitation pushed the workers to a new consciousness of their own interests. In response to their oppression, the masses of working class and poor Iraqis became increasingly active. Unions, newspapers, and workers clubs grew up, organized primarily by the Iraqi Communist Party.

The Communist Party of Iraq, was founded in 1934, by revolutionary workers and intellectuals, who had been inspired by revolutionary ideas during, what is known as, the revolutionary wave of 1917-1927. Everywhere in the world, class conscious workers and young people were sick of the horrible state of the world and wanted to build a new world on new foundations. They rallied to the banner of the Russian Revolution and the goal of a new society.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 had showed the workers of the world a way to get rid of the power of the old social classes who oppressed them. The workers in Russia had built up their own state, in which they chose their own leaders and put forward policies that reflected their needs. The major industries were nationalized and the economy was planned by the workers' state, which controlled the banks and foreign trade. The revolution also showed the peasants that a workers revolution can and would give them what they wanted – land. It showed that if the wealth and resources of a country, even a poor one, are put to work for the people, it is possible

to begin building schools, roads, electrical plants, and industry. The resources can be used to meet peoples' needs rather than provide profits for the rich. The Soviet Union by its existence was living proof that the working class, in alliance with the poor peasants, could build a state that could represent their interests.

Between 1917 and 1927, there were major workers struggles and even attempts at revolution, in many countries. The slaughter and insanity of the World War I proved to many that the capitalists were incapable of running the world for the benefit of humanity. The German workers overthrew the Kaiser. In Italy, workers formed councils and peasants began seizing land from the landowners. In Britain, there was a wave of strikes led by committees of shop stewards who mobilized the working class. In the colonial world, movements raged to break free of imperialism. A huge general strike wracked British occupied Palestine in 1919. In Egypt a general strike led to an attempted revolution against the British and the widespread building of trade unions by the workers. In China, a revolutionary movement was growing which would culminate in a revolutionary attempt from 1925-27. Even in the United States, in 1919, workers seized the city of Seattle and ran it themselves for several days, during the course of a strike. But these attempts did not end up in successful workers revolutions. The failure of the revolutions had dramatic consequences in the Soviet Union. Russia had suffered horribly during World War I. The young workers' state was attacked by 14 different countries, including Britain, France, and the United States. The country was blockaded, starved, battered, and ruined.

The best militants of the working class, educated by the process of revolution, died on the front lines or starved. The Bolshevik Party was less and less able to act as an independent force, a check and correction for the policies of the young workers' state. Instead it became more and more integrated into the state. The state, without active participation of the workers in the Soviets, became more and more bureaucratized.

Stalin, who had begun to consolidate his power in the Party, opened the doors to those who wanted to serve the new bureaucracy, This opened the way for the rise to power of a layer of bureaucrats who were focused on consolidating their own power and privilege rather than spreading the revolution.

Another revolution could have bought new life and hope to the Russian workers. A revolution in highly industrialized Germany, could have also assured a much higher standard of living to the workers of both countries. Without the high level of technology and material wealth generated by the workers of the whole world and shared — the material basis for socialism — people were forced to live in a state of desperate poverty. Their first thought was to survive. They left power in the hands of the state officials.

By the 1930s, the Soviet Union was firmly under the thumb of this parasitic bureaucracy led by Joseph Stalin. In 1924, Stalin proclaimed the theory of “socialism in one country”, the idea that the workers of Russia could build socialism without helping to free the rest of the workers of the world. Behind this absurd theory, were the crass interests of the bureaucrats who feared that revolutions in other countries would spark a resurgence of the Russian working class and put an end to their rule. The Stalinist Bureaucracy took the young Communist Parties, which had answered the call of the Russian Revolution, and trained them to be subservient to the needs of the bureaucracy's counter-revolutionary foreign policy.

Even after the end of the revolutionary wave of 1917-1927, revolutionary opportunities continued to present themselves as class conflict intensified and the post-war economic crisis forced people to look for new solutions to their problems. In 1936, strikes swept Europe, workers occupied factories in France and elected a Socialist Party government. But in each, case the

Stalinist Bureaucracy made a calculated maneuver to bury the workers efforts by supporting the organizations of the nationalist middle class or even the capitalists. Everywhere in the world, the bureaucracy's policies tied the workers to the leadership of other social classes.

The revolutionary traditions of the Bolshevik Party were not dead, however. Many revolutionaries struggled to reverse the bureaucratic degeneration in Russia and in the Communist Parties of the world. Leon Trotsky, one of the most important leaders of the Russian Revolution, President of the 1905 Petrograd Soviet and leader of the Red Army, organized an opposition to these policies and practices. It included some of the best, most devoted, most politically conscious of the revolutionary generation. Their goal was to revive the Bolshevik party and the revolution by fighting for a new course—to rebuild workers democracy in Russia. They aimed at breaking the stranglehold of Stalinism and restoring the revolutionary independence of the workers organizations around the world.

With the isolation of the revolutionaries, the bureaucracy was able to repress the Left Opposition. In Russia they were put on trial, exiled, tortured and many were murdered. The bureaucracy hunted the Left Opposition the world over. Trotsky was exiled in 1927. His sons and his daughter all met their death at the hands of Stalin's agents. Trotsky himself was finally murdered in Mexico just before World War II. Stalin destroyed the entire leadership of the Bolshevik Party that had led the revolution in 1917.

This degeneration of the Russian Revolution had a profound impact on the workers movements around the world, including in Iraq. The Communist Party in Iraq was established well after the Stalinist bureaucracy had taken power in Russia. On the one hand, it was a workers' organization, led by sincere and dedicated revolutionaries. On the other hand, their political perspectives and policies were defined by the Soviet Bureaucracy. The Communist Party of Iraq fought at the forefront of the battles of the working class. It led the trade union struggle for better conditions and organized demonstrations against the occupation. The strategy of the leadership, however, was based on the unconditional support of the nationalist officers. This policy was a political betrayal of the working class, which was to have drastic consequences, as we shall see.

World War II and the End of Colonial Empire

World War II began in 1939. To many of the nationalist officers in the Iraqi army, it seemed that the war could be used to shake off the British, break the hold of their allies in the traditional elite, and push the country towards modern industrial development. The army lacked the forces to seize power for itself, but supporting one group or another, it could influence the situation, putting pressure on the King to appoint one official or another.

King Faisal's son, Ghazi, had occupied the throne since Faisal's death in 1933. In 1939, Ghazi died in a car crash and the throne was passed to his three-year-old son, Faisal II. In 1940, with army support, a nationalist lawyer named Rashid Ali al-Gaylani became prime minister. Rashid Ali al-Gaylani supported the army's program of domestic development. He sought an alliance with the Axis powers led by Hitler's Germany, needing an ally that was hostile to Britain. The Iraqi army under Rashid Ali clashed with British troops, and Rashid Ali was expelled. The British installed a weak government with the Prime Minister General Nuri al-Said. His regime promised not to challenge British interests or disturb the landlords.

By the end of the War, Europe was greatly weakened by the war's costs and destruction. The European imperialist countries were unable to continue the direct colonial domination that they had employed before. Britain's domination of Africa and the Middle East began to crumble as the colonized peoples threw off the colonial yoke. The United States, relatively undamaged and

economically bolstered by the war, moved to reconstruct the world economy with itself as master. The U.S. moved aggressively to fill the imperial role that Britain had played, in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, and Iran, as well as many other places around the world. The U.S. was about to become the major imperial power in the Middle East.

In this period, the Arab countries were caught between the two poles of power in the post-war world – the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cold War started what was called the Arab Cold War between the allies of the U.S., and the allies of the Soviet Union. By the mid-1950s, Iraq was jointly controlled by Britain and the United States. It joined Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran in the Baghdad Pact of 1955. These countries pledged their hostility to the U.S.S.R., as well as to the mass movements which might change the social structure in their countries.

In Iraq, in the 1940s, strikes broke out in the oil industry as workers took advantage of the crumbling British rule. In 1948, workers' strikes forced the government to repeal a military treaty allowing Britain to occupy Iraq in times of war. The British were forced to withdraw their military. But soon after, the Iraqi government declared martial law. Many of the Iraqi Communist Party members were publicly hanged in Baghdad. Despite the loss of its leadership, the Communist Party grew rapidly in the 1950s, and participated in a growing mass movement against the monarchy.

In 1958, King Faisal II and General Nuri Al-Said were killed in a coup led by nationalist officers in the Iraqi Army with Brigadier General Abd Al-Karim Qassim at the head. Immediately the U.S. landed 20,000 marines in Lebanon and the British dropped 6,600 paratroopers into Jordan. They feared that a nationalist movement or possibly a revolution in Iraq might spread to the other Arab countries.

Qassim became Prime Minister and Commander in Chief. He enjoyed enormous mass support amongst ordinary Iraqis. The Communist Party supported Qassim unconditionally, under directives from Moscow. The support of the Communist Party for Qassim was crucial in order for him to mobilize the masses behind him. The Qassim regime prioritized urban development and education, and also addressed the need of the peasantry for land reform. Qassim decreed the division of the landed estates of the tribal elite. His decree on land reform was taken as a signal by the poor peasants to storm the estates of the big landholders, and divide the land. This action by the peasants broke the political power of the landed elite for good.

The government increased tariffs and began building roads, streets, hospitals, water and electrical plants, and factories. Most dramatically Qassim's government nationalized 98 percent of Iraqi oil fields, which had been owned outright by the British. The refineries themselves remained in the hands of the foreign corporations, but the state forced oil companies to pay heavy tariffs for the right to extract oil. This ended the decades-long flow of most of the oil profits into the hands of western oil corporations.

The Iraqi Communist Party benefited greatly from the upsurge in mass political activity. The atmosphere of revolutionary change and political freedom allowed the Communists to recruit widely amongst workers and the middle class. The growth of the Iraqi Communist Party increased its influence. In 1959, after a series of massive demonstrations, the Communist Party representatives were included in Qassim's cabinet.

Despite the popularity of the revolution, Qassim's real base of support was limited to the army. A military coup overthrew the rule of the landlords, by unleashing the peasants and workers anger against the old regime. But Qassim's power was threatened from below by the growing activity of the workers and peasants and the growth of the Communist Party.

The Ba'ath Party

In this same period, another political party began to form in Iraq. In 1944, the Ba'ath Party was formed, in Syria, by teachers. Its supporters were mostly from the educated middle class and lower-ranking army officers. The Ba'ath Party called for “nationalism” and “socialism” by which it meant an independent Arab nation with a strong domestic economy run by the state. The Ba'ath Party was not very powerful in Iraq until after the revolution of 1958. After 1958, Iraqi Ba'athists recruited people from the army and state bureaucracy who were against the Communist Party. They accused Qassim of leading the country into the arms of the Soviet Union. During the period between 1958 and 1963 the Ba'ath Party also made political ties with the United States through the CIA.

A series of coup attempts by army officers against Qassim took place. Most importantly, a young CIA contact named Saddam Hussein, who was a member of the Ba'ath Party, was involved in a plot to assassinate Qassim. The plot failed and Qassim survived. Saddam Hussein fled to Cairo where he established tighter connections with the CIA. Between 1959 and 1963 Saddam Hussein spent time in Cairo, receiving money and intelligence training from the CIA. During this time, the Ba'ath Party rallied its forces to form the National Guard. The National Guard, an armed organization, formed by the Ba'ath Party, was used to violently attack members of the Communist Party.

With the power of the workers and peasants threatening from below and imperialism bearing down from above, the army officers looked for a way to keep control out of the hands of the Communist Party. Some thought that the best way to do this was to get rid of Qassim and install the Ba'ath Party in power.

By 1962, the Qassim regime was hemmed in on all sides. The Communist Party was growing in strength. Qassim attempted to hold onto power by banning all political parties and using the police to control his opponents. He had most of the leading members of the Communist Party imprisoned.

Failure of Communist Party Policy

In the face of these attacks, the Communist Party failed to defend itself and this disoriented the workers. The Communist Party had a policy based, not on the needs of the Iraqi working class, but on orders given by the bureaucratic rulers of the Soviet Union. They ordered the Communist Party to support Qassim without making a bid for independent workers power, even while Qassim was sending Communist militants to prison. If the Party had put the interests of the workers first, it could have organized the workers to defend their organizations from attack. It could have exposed the limitations of Qassim's policies and pushed the workers to organize to go further, maybe to the point of revolution. The workers, watching their leaders go quietly to jail, were confused and demoralized.

In Comes the Ba'ath Party

In 1963, the Ba'ath Party organized a coup with General Arif, an army officer who had up until that point been a close ally of Qassim's. Arif felt that Qassim had been too weak in dealing with the Communist Party, especially after he let them into the government. Arif had no organization of his own and made an alliance with the Ba'ath Party in order to take power.

During the Ba'ath Party coup, the Communist Party offered their support to Qassim. He turned down the Communist Party's support, seeing the Communists as a bigger threat than the Ba'ath

Party. Qassim feared the workers more than he feared his rivals among the officers. Without any support, the Ba'ath Party easily overthrew Qassim's regime.

The Ba'ath Party immediately sent the National Guard to crush the Communists. The CIA had provided the Ba'ath Party with lists of Communist militants targeted for assassination. The National Guard thugs carried out a block-by-block extermination of working class political activists and unionists. Sports arenas and schools became concentration camps and interrogation centers. Communist leaders, jailed earlier by Qassim, were executed. Intense street battles in poor neighborhoods swept the country. Nearly 5,000 Communists and left-wing activists were killed, and 10,000 others were imprisoned, while thousands more fled the country.

The revolutionary period from 1958-1963 was a political defeat for working and poor Iraqis. In the previous decades they had participated in politics, built unions, and the Communist Party, and played a role in Iraq's political struggles. But the policy of the Communist Party had led them to support General Qassim rather than organizing in their own interests. When Qassim's rule collapsed, the workers were unprepared to challenge the Ba'ath Party's bloody repression. By the 1970s, the Ba'ath Party regime was able to destroy the workers' organizations and build up a repressive police state.

Temporary Loss of Power by the Ba'ath Party

People were outraged by the actions of the National Guard. There was an angry reaction from the population against the Ba'ath Party. Massive demonstrations against the Ba'ath Party were held, and General Arif quickly expelled the Ba'ath Party from the government. Arif used the army to repress the Ba'ath Party within Iraq. Many Ba'ath Party members received long prison sentences. Arif removed the Ba'ath Party in order to stay in power. But in doing so he lost a pillar of support and his regime became weaker.

During this time, the leadership of the Ba'ath Party was taken over by a group of Ba'ath Party activists, who had been close to the CIA. This faction, based in the Sunni district of Tikrit, was led by General Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr, the cousin of Saddam Hussein. They assumed leadership of the Ba'ath Party in 1966.

In 1968, the Ba'ath Party, under Bakr and Hussein, seized power. Their coup was a bloodless expulsion of the Arif government, which had very little support by that time. The Ba'ath leaders had learned from their time in the government in 1963. They knew that unless they were ruthless they would be expelled from the government again. They took power, making no alliances with potential rivals, and used terror to consolidate their rule. The military and police were purged of people who would resist the Ba'ath Party dictatorship. Repression against political opponents began immediately. Saddam Hussein became the head of intelligence while General Hassan al-Bakr became President.

The Ba'ath Party in Power

The revolutionary period produced a major shift in the relationship between the West and Iraq. The oil fields were no longer owned by foreign corporations, but were now under the control of the Ba'ath Party state. It used the oil revenue to build up a domestic industry and infrastructure. The Ba'ath Party officially nationalized the oil refineries under state control in 1973. Iraq was then a part of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). OPEC is an international organization of oil producing regimes including Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and others. OPEC was formed in 1960 to increase these governments' shares of the oil wealth,

which were being drained out of their respective countries by the foreign oil companies. They were unsuccessful in this attempt, and OPEC played a minor role until the 1970s.

In 1973, the OPEC nations organized to dramatically cut oil production and raised the price of oil worldwide. Iraq's oil revenue jumped from \$600 million in 1972 to \$8.5 billion in 1976 and \$26.5 billion in 1980. The Ba'ath Party had allied itself with the U.S. during the 1960s in order to defeat the Communist Party and General Qassim. But during the 1970s, Iraq's regime drew closer to the Soviet Union. With Soviet technical assistance, Iraq opened new oil fields in the south and expanded production in the north, becoming the world's second largest oil producer.

A Dramatic Change

This influx of oil wealth went to developing domestic industry and modern infrastructure. The state developed large-scale factories in chemical production, weaving and spinning, and construction. They also built roads and railways. The Ba'ath Party regime of the 1970s, oversaw a dramatic transformation of the country. In 1957, only 38.8 percent of the population lived in urban centers. By 1983, seventy-five percent of the population lived in the urban centers. Between 1958 and 1983, the population doubled to a total of 14 million, thanks to modern and mostly free health care. In 1979, Iraq received the United Nations award for combating illiteracy. Free education at all levels was expanded, and many women went to school for the first time. The per capita income of Iraqis saw a 900 percent increase between 1968 and 1979.

While the leading Ba'ath figures were Sunnis from the Tikrit region, the revolutionary period had produced a secular identity based on the nation. People saw themselves as Iraqi, rather than Shi'a or Sunni. Iraqis of all religions were now subject to the same laws.

The oil wealth also meant a rapid growth of the Ba'ath Party's repressive state apparatus. The army was expanded from 50,000 in 1958 to 200,000 by the mid-70s, armed with advanced military technology from the Soviet Union and France. By 1978, twenty percent of all state employees were employed in surveillance or police operations in one or another of several security agencies. Saddam Hussein used his position as head of state security to consolidate his own personal power, and by 1979 he had himself appointed president.

The Ba'ath party feared a repeat of 1963, when they were driven out of the government, by General Arif. They feared a resurgence of opposition. They knew that the Communist Party was the only organization which could attempt to organize an opposition. In 1973, the Ba'ath Party offered the Communists a minor and inconsequential role in the new government. This was acceptable to the Soviet Union due to the role that Iraq was playing as its ally in the region. The surviving leaders of the Communist Party compromised their credibility even further by taking part in administering the brutal state apparatus, alongside the Ba'ath Party, between 1973 and 1978.



The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

In order to understand the period of Iraq's history from 1979 until today, it is essential to understand a bit about the history of Iraq's neighbor, the oil-rich state of Iran. Iran, like Iraq, has large oil deposits. Iran was an early source of oil for the British who set up an oil corporation, the Anglo-Persian (Iranian) Oil Company in 1909 to build up an oil industry in Iran. After World War I, the British invaded Iran and supported the rise of a dictatorial army officer named Reza Khan. Reza Khan had himself crowned king, or Shah, in 1925.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the British oil industry grew. During the same period however, a movement amongst the country's middle class and workers developed under the leadership of a lawyer, Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq. As in Iraq, the Iranian Communist Party, called the Tudeh Party, was one of the major forces in the movement against British Imperialism. The main goal of the movement was nationalization of the oil fields and democratic reforms of the state. After

World War II, the movement for reform picked up momentum because of the weakening of the British Empire.

In Iran, there was a fake parliament known as the Majlis. The Majlis was tolerated by the Shah, because it gave an appearance of democracy. The mass movement for democratic reform and oil nationalization however had changed the balance of forces in the country, and made the Majlis the focus of national politics. In 1951, the Majlis chose Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq as Prime Minister. After being elected, Mossadeq, like Qassim, seized the oil fields from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and attempted to enforce tariffs.

In response to this threat to its oil interests, Britain, with the help of the CIA, organized a coup to remove Mossadeq. They replaced him with the former Shah's son, Mohammed Reza Shah. The oil was divided between Britain and the US, with 40 percent of the revenues going to each country. The new Shah was given aid in crushing his enemies. The CIA helped the Shah to set up a secret police force, SAVAK, which kidnapped and murdered thousands of Tudeh Party members.

During the seventies, the United States strengthened its relationship with the Shah as a way to ensure dominance in the broader Middle East. Under the Shah, Iran was transformed into a massive military power. Iran stood alongside Israel as the United States' military proxy in the Middle East during the Cold War. With U.S. military aid, the Shah ruthlessly persecuted the influential Iranian Communist Party. Iran intervened in Yemen when a popular revolution threatened the monarchy there. Iran also provided aid and military support for U.S. ally, Pakistan, during its war with India.

During the 1970s, SAVAK kept a tight grip on the country, kidnapping and torturing anyone involved in the Tudeh Party or revolutionary groups who attempted to oppose the Shah's regime. The Shah allowed Islamic clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini to organize, knowing that they opposed both the Shah's regime and the Communist Party. This strategy backfired on the Shah. In 1979, the Shah was overthrown in a massive popular revolution led not by the Communists, but by the Islamic revolutionary movement. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 deprived the U.S. of one of its most important military assets in the region. It also threatened the Ba'ath regime by calling on Iraq's Shi'a population to join in the Islamic Revolution.

Saddam Hussein saw the Iranian revolution as a threat to his dictatorship because it appealed to the Shi'a to rise up. The Shi'a in Iraq make up a majority of the population. They live mostly in the South, along Iraq's eastern border with Iran. But Saddam also saw the Iranian Revolution as an opportunity to gain power for Iraq in the region. With the collapse of the Shah's Iran, the United States had lost an important military ally. The revolution in Iran shifted the regional balance of forces and created a possibility for the Ba'ath Party regime to gain favor from the United States by attacking Iran. In late September 1980, Iraq began the invasion of Iran. The Iranian people were already mobilized and were outraged to be invaded by a foreign country. Iraq had neither of these advantages. But it had a different advantage —military and economic support from the United States.

The U.S saw the Iran-Iraq War as an opportunity to attack the Iranian revolution, and to bring Iraq more in line with U.S. policies. The U.S. was playing a game, hoping to see both countries weakened. For the capitalists of the United States and Europe, both regimes were a barrier to their control of the Middle East. Both had nationalized their oil resources and continued to keep a significant portion of their oil profits within the country.



Donald Rumsfeld, Envoy to Iraq 1983

During the Iran-Iraq war, the U.S. provided Iraq with economic aid, weapons, and the materials for biological and chemical weapons. These included \$5 billion in agricultural credits, as well as \$684 million to build an oil pipeline through Jordan (Construction to be undertaken by Bechtel Corporation). Saddam launched an attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja where Kurds had begun a revolt. The gas attacks killed 6,800 people. Ironically Saddam would later be tried and convicted for this U.S. supported massacre. Overall during the war, more than a million people lost their lives, 400,000 from Iraq alone.

1991: The First Gulf War

In 1989, a truce was signed with Iran. The Iraqi government owed enormous debts to the governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Iraq's oil revenues were the only potential means of paying these debts. A crisis arose when Kuwait, in a process called "slant-drilling", drilled diagonally into the oil deposits under Iraq. Kuwait began to produce oil beyond the quotas determined by OPEC. More oil on the market meant a decrease in oil prices all around. This undercut Iraq's only source of income. Saddam considered invading Kuwait, sensing this might be an opportunity to reclaim the territory lost during World War I. Saddam's regime was afraid to begin a war against Kuwait, fearing what the U.S. response might be. The Iraqi government consulted with the U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie, in order to know what the U.S. attitude toward their planned invasion would be. Glaspie told the Iraqi regime, that the U.S. had "no opinion on inter-Arab disputes". This statement seemed to indicate that the U.S. was willing let Iraq retake Kuwait without interference. Iraq began to amass an invasion force on the border with Kuwait. The invasion of Kuwait began on August 2nd, 1990.

The United States, with newly elected President George H.W. Bush, the current Bush's father, made this invasion the pretext for an international campaign against Iraq. Despite its war losses, Iraq still had a relatively large army compared to its neighbors. The U.S. saw this military imbalance as a threat to its interests in the region, particularly with regards to Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil producer and firmly tied politically, financially and militarily to the U.S. After the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam began to make threatening moves towards Saudi Arabia. By invading Kuwait and threatening Saudi Arabia, Saddam had walked into the trap, which the U.S. had set for him. The U.S. had set this trap, with regional domination of the Middle East and its oil, as the goal.

The U.S. war against Iraq aimed to show the world that there was going to be a “new world order”, based on American military supremacy. This took place against the backdrop of the Soviet Union’s collapse. The Soviet Union was no longer the second superpower in the world. For decades, the Soviet Union, and its military and economic power, had stood as a barrier to total U.S. domination in the Middle East and the broader world. This situation provided underdeveloped countries some space to maneuver. Countries like Iraq, India, and Pakistan could make military, economic and diplomatic agreements with one or the other superpower depending on who was offering the best deal. The two great powers would hesitate to engage in conflicts, which might precipitate a full-scale war. Looking at the history of the 20th century, it is hard to imagine that invasions such as those of the Gulf Wars could have taken place without the collapse of the Soviet state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. was the sole military superpower in the world. Any state desiring access to the world’s resources would have to play by rules written in Washington.

In July 1990, the U.S. Congress voted to impose sanctions on Iraq, and the U.S. began to gather a coalition of different countries who would support an invasion. The U.S. was supported by thirty-three different countries who took part in the coalition against Iraq. In August, the U.N. Security Council voted to impose its own economic sanctions. The countries that supported the U.S. understood that there was a “new world order”, and to be a part of it they would have to play the U.S. game. This is clear when we look at the countries who supported the U.S. sponsored U.N. coalition during the invasion. The U.S.’s economic competitors, Germany and Japan, provided \$16 billion of the \$61.1 billion cost of the invasion. Even Syria, whose own deeply nationalist Ba'ath Party regime had been closely allied with the Soviet Union during the preceding decades, sent 16,000 troops.

During this time, the White House made their case for war to the American people. They talked about the danger Iraq posed to the region and the world. President Bush accused Saddam Hussein of possessing chemical and biological weapons, and trying to develop a nuclear weapons program. The government claimed that Iraq had the fifth largest army in the world. The war was portrayed as a war to save the world from a mad dictator, with immense power.

The U.S. media perpetuated these claims, parroting the White House line. The corporate media sold the American people a bill of goods in order to get them to support the war. The government of Kuwait paid \$11 million to a U.S. public relations firm, Hill and Knowlton, who manufactured a story about Iraqi soldiers tearing babies out of incubators during the invasion. The story was later proved to be a fabrication -- the so-called nurse who gave testimony about it, was actually a member of the Kuwaiti Royal Family living in Paris.



25/3/91 Al Maqwa, Kuwait

In 1991, the U.S. launched Operation Desert Storm, a massive invasion against Iraq. During the six-week long invasion, 1000 bombing runs were made per day, 250,000 people were massacred, and Iraq's infrastructure was left in ruins. Ammunition rounds used in combat contained depleted uranium, a heavy and dense metal made from spent nuclear fuel. Low levels of radiation in the metal can become extremely toxic after weapons are fired, and the radioactive material gets dispersed into the air and dust. Depleted uranium has been linked to increased cancer rates in both the Iraqi population and in Gulf-War veterans.

During the invasion, the U.S. broadcast promises to the people of Iraq that they would support uprisings against Saddam's regime. In Basra and Nasiriyah, Iraqi army troops returning from the front revolted. Soldiers joined civilian protesters in the streets and marched on the prisons and government buildings, freeing prisoners and driving out government officials. Within days of the first uprisings in Basra and Nasiriyah, the movement had spread to all of the largest cities of the south. The organizations active in the movement were largely religious Shi'a groups, without any real plan of action. In the north, Kurds led by Kurdish political parties launched an uprising. The uprising began on March 4th, in the town of Raina. Within ten days every major city in the North was in the hands of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

The U.S., with its troops at the gates of Baghdad and the Iraqi airspace under its control, allowed Saddam to mobilize his air force and army to crush the uprisings. The Iraqi National Guard mobilized and violently suppressed the people. Over the course of a few weeks, tens of thousands of civilians were killed, while the U.S. forces looked on. Thousands attempted to flee to Turkey and Iran, an exodus that the U.N. Commissioner for Refugees called the most dramatic in all 40 years of the U.N. Commission's existence. The refugees walked along the roads without food or medical supplies, while Iraqi helicopters shot them down with machine guns. According to Greenpeace, an estimated 1000 refugees were dying every day during the repression. Despite their democratic rhetoric, the U.S. preferred to maintain Saddam's dictatorship, rather than face the threat that the population might take matters into its own hands, and establish its own regime.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq accomplished a number of objectives. The Iraqi army was shattered. The invasion also created a pretext for a U.S. military presence close to the Saudi oil fields. And of course, it gave the U.S. direct access to the oil of Iraq, a huge potential source of wealth and profit for the corporations.

Clinton's War on Iraq

During the 1990s, with the Democrats and President Clinton, the U.S. maintained the same policy towards Iraq as Bush Sr.'s administration. The goal was to control Iraqi oil, despite Saddam Hussein's continued though weakened rule. This presented a difficult dilemma for the U.S. The Iraqi regime sought to create economic links with the U.S.'s competitors on the world market. In fact, France and Russia were ready to take advantage of deals they had already made with Hussein's regime. In order to keep Iraq from developing such economic links, the U.S. relied on the economic sanctions against Iraq, imposed through the United Nations.

These sanctions restricted trade with Iraq to food, medicine, and basic necessities. The sanctions limited the sale of oil, and kept Iraq in a state of ruin. More than a million people including 750,000 children died of starvation and disease. Civilian deaths during the sanctions happened at a rate of 90,000 annually over the twelve years. The harsh conditions kept the population entirely dependent on Saddam's state-run food and medical aid program. United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, Dennis Halliday, resigned in 1998 after a 34-year career in the U.N., stating that, "I don't want to administer a programme that satisfies the definition of genocide." On May 12, 1996, the CBS news program "60 Minutes" interviewed Madeleine Albright, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., and later Secretary of State. When asked what she thought about the 500,000 children who had died by 1996, she answered, "We think the price is worth it."

From Containment to Invasion

The policy of using United Nations sanctions to keep Iraq's oil off the market had a built-in problem. The energy needs of expanding industrial production worldwide, and the profits of the capitalists, required a corresponding increase in the oil supply. Oil consumption during the first two decades of the 21st century is predicted to increase by 50 percent. In order to meet demand, the Gulf States, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, will be required to increase output by 80 percent. The needs of capitalism demand the economic development of these countries, and an increase in their oil output. This presented a striking problem for capitalists in the U.S. Two of these three regimes, Iraq and Iran, were hostile to the U.S., and currently under economic sanctions.

In the 1970s, an ideological grouping of rightwing imperialist politicians, within the Republican Party, had come together calling themselves "Neo-Conservatives" or "Neo-Cons". Many of them served under Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, and George Bush Sr. in the early 1990s. They

called for a policy of aggressive “regime change” to solve the problem of nationalist regimes that were not totally cooperative with U.S. imperialism. Most of the Neo-Cons were grouped around the “Project for a New American Century” (PNAC), a Washington think tank, which advocates the extension of American imperial dominance, taking advantage of the power vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Neo-Cons represent the section of the American ruling class, which is most ready to use the military to control the world's raw materials. The major American oil corporations stand to gain the rights to more than 75 percent of Iraq's oil fields. Other major supporters of the war included wartime services supplier Halliburton, the company formerly headed by Vice President Dick Cheney. It has received more than \$10 billion in contracts for the war.

A 1998 petition circulated by PNAC, led the Clinton administration and Congress to pass the “Iraq Liberation Act”, calling for regime change in Iraq. This was followed by a buildup of U.S. and British military forces in the Persian Gulf region. In December, after the expulsion of U.N. weapons inspectors, Clinton launched Operation Desert Fox aiming 400 cruise missiles and 600 air attacks at various targets in Iraq.

At the end of the 1990s, with an election year coming in 2000, an important section of the U.S. capitalist class supported the agenda of the Neo-Cons. In 2000, U.S. corporations threw their weight behind George W. Bush and his Neo-Con policy team. According to The Washington Post, during the first half of 1999, Bush raised \$36.2 million from corporate donors, while his opponent Al Gore received only \$18.2 million. Even corporations like Bank of America, that traditionally support Democrats, gave substantially more to Bush. American corporations made their choice: they chose the Neo-Con policy.

September 11th: An Excuse for Imperialism

In 2001, the sanctions were coming up for review in the United Nations. Without a drastic overturn in Baghdad, it was possible that Iraq’s oil might fall into the hands of European corporations. Saddam had already begun to have Iraqi banks use the Euro to trade on the world market. He was also making deals with various European countries to develop Iraq's oil industry, independent of the United States.

The September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center in New York changed everything. The American population was outraged and disoriented by the attacks on the Twin Towers. With the help of the media, the administration cynically mobilized their spokesmen to spread lies in order to prepare the American public for the wars the administration wanted to launch.

The September 11th attacks were supposedly linked to a radical political and religious organization called Al-Qaeda, and their leader, Osama bin Laden. Al-Qaeda is a group of radical Islamists who came out of a violent struggle in Afghanistan during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1978, the Soviet Union was drawn into a war to occupy that country. The Communist Party of Afghanistan had seized power and was under attack. The Soviet Union came to its aid, with its military. The U.S. military helped create the Mujahadeen, to fight against and weaken the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Mujahadeen were Islamic radicals from all over the Islamic world, recruited and trained in Pakistan, with the aid of American intelligence and Saudi money.

After the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in defeat in early 1989, the U.S. abandoned the Mujahadeen, now that they had served their purpose in driving out the Soviets. The country descended into a factional civil war, as the different Mujahadeen groupings fought for control.

With the flow of U.S. money stopped, the Mujahadeen had little reason to overlook the role that the U.S. was playing in the Middle East. For some of the Mujahadeen, including the wealthy young Saudi, Osama bin Laden, with the Soviet infidels driven out of Afghanistan, the next task was to remove the other invaders. The Mujahadeen turned on what they considered “the American infidels” and their “unholy allies” from Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Qatar. They also wanted to remove the “atheistic infidels”, like the Ba'ath parties of Iraq and Syria from power. Bin Laden and other fighters in Afghanistan formed the organization Al-Qaeda in 1988.

Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda are allegedly responsible for the bombing of a hotel in Yemen in 1992, a car bombing of the World Trade Center parking lot in 1993, and the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kenya in 1998, as well as the plane hijacking attacks on September 11, 2001. Within days of the September 11th attacks, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were declared to be the culprits. The hunt for Osama bin Laden was used to kick off the expansion of U.S. operations in the Middle East. The first move that the administration made was to take care of their interests in Afghanistan.

The Soviet Union had withdrawn in 1989, and the country was plunged into a civil war. This chaos became a barrier to U.S. interests when it interfered with the possibility of an oil pipeline from Central Asia through Afghanistan. An Islamic political movement arose. The Taliban were religious students trained in Pakistan, using Saudi money, with the approval of the U.S. After the chaos of the civil war between the Mujahadeen groups, people were exhausted and looked for some order and stability. The Taliban were able to provide stability by imposing a rigid dictatorship based on an extreme version of Sunni Islam. In 1996, the U.S. oil corporation, Unocal, opened discussions with the Taliban to develop Afghanistan as part of the region's oil and natural gas infrastructure. Strategically this would secure the territory linking Russia, China, and the Gulf States, important territory for oil and natural gas. In 1998, these discussions fell apart.

In 2001, with the support of leading Democrats, the Bush administration undertook the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Thousands of Afghan civilians were killed. A government was installed on the basis of ex-Mujahadeen and tribal warlords. The president of this occupation regime is Hamid Karzai. During the 1990s, Karzai was a consultant for Unocal in Afghanistan. To this day, the U.S. military maintains bases along the route of current and future oil and natural gas pipelines.

The attacks on the Twin Towers allowed the U.S. to pursue the policy of “regime change” to its conclusion in Afghanistan and they were eager to begin the next campaign. The Bush administration, staffed and supported by the Neo-Cons, seized upon the events of September 11th to carry out one of their other chief objectives -- regime change in Iraq

War and Lies

The case for war was built on the basis of a series of lies, over the course of two and a half years. Saddam Hussein was linked to the events of September 11th because he was said to be “willing to harbor and give aid to terrorists”. It was implied that Saddam Hussein’s regime had even reached out to Al-Qaeda. That this regime could be linked to Islamic terrorism is a ridiculous idea. The secular Ba'ath government had brutally repressed Islamic radicals such as Osama bin Laden for decades using all the tools of surveillance and torture at their disposal. In support of its claims, the Bush administration made a big deal about the presence in Iraq of the militant Islamist group Ansar al-Islam. It failed to mention that the group’s camp was located, not in Ba'ath controlled territory, but in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region closely allied with the U.S.

The Bush Administration terrorized people with stories of a prototype Iraqi missile with an 800-mile range. A Gulf War era U.N. resolution made it illegal for Iraq to build missiles that had a range in excess of 93 miles. The "Al-Samoud 2 Missile" referred to was shown by U.N. Weapons Inspectors to be flying 15 miles over limit, and only because it was not loaded down with its guidance system during tests. The story was further developed with claims that Iraq was seeking "yellow cake" uranium in Niger. So-called "yellow cake" uranium is enriched uranium, which can be used for nuclear fission, in bombs and in nuclear power plants. This was supposedly sought by Iraq in order to build nuclear weapons, with the implication that Iraq might sell or give nuclear weapons to terrorist groups, and arm its missiles with nuclear warheads. Evidence supporting the Nigerian "yellow cake" story, was presented to the U.N. by Secretary of State, former General Colin Powell. The documents supporting this claim, were later determined to be falsified.

The Bush Administration cited supposed discrepancies in Iraq's accounting for its chemical weapons (purchased with U.S. and European aid during the Iran-Iraq war). They implied that 1000 tons of chemical weapons were unaccounted for. What they failed to mention was that the United Nations Special Commission had already determined that the chemicals would have deteriorated by that time, and thus would no longer be a threat.

There is not now, nor has there ever been, any evidence to support any of these claims, despite the best attempts of Bush administration spin-artists. Today, however, the occupation of Iraq is a fact, and these claims are all but forgotten.

The War and the Anti-War Movement

The preparations for war did not take place unopposed. All around the world people poured into the streets to protest the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The largest demonstrations took place in February of 2003 just before the invasion of Iraq. Between six and ten million people all over the world demonstrated against war on the same day, on every continent. In many cities and towns in the United States people organized the first demonstrations against war ever to take place there. A New York Times reporter stated that "huge anti-war demonstrations...are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet -- The United States and world public opinion."

Shock and Awe

On the 21st of March 2003, the invasion began with a televised "shock and awe bombing" – a bombing campaign using dramatic new weaponry. U.S. military forces launched 300-400 cruise missiles per day for two days, more than double the number that were launched during the entire 40 days of the first Gulf War. This was followed by the deployment of ground troops, which captured key Iraqi cities over the course of the following 21 days. Soldiers were sent to protect the oil ministry and oil fields. Water, sanitation, and electricity were purposefully knocked out. The museums and libraries, containing centuries old artifacts of ancient civilization, were looted and burned in the chaos. Iraq's so-called liberation actually meant the absolute dismemberment of a society.

Just as the British did in the 1920s and 1930s, the United States relied on the traditional tribal and religious elite from the Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurdish communities, to set up its colonial government. The population today finds itself under the control of the only groupings who can maintain an organized political apparatus under conditions of occupation – sectarian religious parties, who receive the patronage of the U.S. The Bush administration claims to be bringing democracy and freedom to Iraq, but its real aims are made clear by the policies of the puppet

Iraqi government. In 2005, oil “Production Sharing Agreements” with western corporations would hand control of Iraq’s vast oil wealth to foreign corporations, leaving as little as 17 percent of the oil profits in Iraqi hands.

In case there were any doubts about the attitude of corporate America to the rule of the Neo-Cons, and the wars that they have undertaken, one should look at the funding for the 2004 election. Corporations gave overwhelmingly to the re-election campaign of George W. Bush. The majority of the capitalists supported the Neo-Con policy of imperialism well into 2004.

After the February 15th demonstrations, resistance to the war in the U.S. continued, but on a more local scale, with regular vigils, and small protests, as well as periodic demonstrations in the major cities, none of which reached the same mass scale as February 15th. Resistance also began to take place amongst the soldiers. There are currently 1.6 million men and women who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. These soldiers were and are subjected to daily doses of war-zone violence. As of October 2007, according to the Department of Defense, more than four thousand U.S. soldiers have died in Iraq and Afghanistan. Between 30,000 and 100,000 soldiers have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 1,800 wounded soldiers have required amputation of one or more limbs. Six thousand wounded soldiers suffer from breathing and eating impairments, blindness or severe disfigurement. Desertions began happening on a mass scale as many enlisted soldiers rejected service in a war they didn't believe in. Official government statistics report 8,000 desertions since the beginning of the war, but conscientious objector organizations report that this number may be much higher.

Two thousand active duty military personnel are openly speaking out against the war. In 2007, we have also seen retired officers, up to the rank of generals, criticize the government’s policy in Iraq. Also many military families have spoken out against the war. In 2005, Cindy Sheehan, mother of one of the first soldiers killed early in the war became a spokesperson for the anti-war movement. She camped out in front of Bush's ranch in Crawford Texas, demanding to confront the President. Her voice represented the experience of ordinary people in the U.S., faced with the reality of a war based on lies, and fought over the control of oil.

Today, almost five years later, daily life in Iraq remains unlivable for most people, with unemployment as high as 70 percent. The average wages for those with jobs is \$150 per month. Consumer goods have doubled in price since the occupation began. Only 37 percent of Iraqi homes are connected to sewer systems. One quarter of Iraqi children suffer from chronic malnutrition. Seventy percent of all childhood deaths result from simple diarrhea and respiratory illness. Ninety percent of hospitals lack essential resources. The Lancet, a British medical journal, estimates close to 650,000 deaths as a result of the war. According to the U.N., 100,000 people are fleeing the country each month, with the number of Iraqis now living in other Arab countries standing at two million. An estimated 2.5 million are refugees, within Iraq. Death squads and militias carry out regular suicide-bombings, creating a daily death toll of about 100 Iraqis.

The U.S. has relied on sectarian religious parties to build its puppet government. These parties, armed and financed by the U.S., are linked to all sorts of atrocities, abductions, and murders taking place by the hour. Journalists Robert Fisk and Dahr Jamail point out that these sectarian murders reinforce the U.S. occupation by keeping ordinary people in a state of terror and unable to organize together to resist the occupation. Likewise, the American people are told that Iraq is being torn apart by so called sectarian violence which would be much worse without the presence of American troops. In reality, it is the U.S. occupation that is the number one cause of violence.

The 2006 Elections and the “Troop Surge”

By 2006, a majority of Americans were sick of the war, and wanted it to end. George Bush's approval rating was in the low 30 percent range. In late 2006, the U.S. Congressional elections took place. The Democratic Party was elected as the majority in Congress. This election was widely seen as a referendum on the Iraq War. A USA Today poll found six out of ten Americans dissatisfied with “the way things are going in the country.” Exit polls found roughly the same number opposed to the war in Iraq and voting for Democrats. For many people a vote for the Democrats meant a vote against the Bush administration's policies. The Democrats however, are ideologically and politically in agreement with the Bush administrations policies. They serve the same financial and corporate interests. According to Counterpunch Magazine, two-thirds of Democrats running for seats in the House of Representatives opposed even setting a timetable for the gradual withdrawal of troops from Iraq.

In January of 2007, President Bush announced a so-called “troop surge”. Thirty thousand additional brigades of U.S. soldiers were shipped to Iraq. The Democrats responded by rolling over on their backs and passing the military funding for the next phase of the war. Their only sign of opposition was a non-binding resolution in the House of Representatives, recommending a timetable be set for troop withdrawal.

The Petraeus Report

On September 11th, 2007, just in time for the sixth year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, General Petraeus, the general in charge of carrying out Bush's Iraq policy, delivered a report to Congress on the results of the surge, and the progress of the war. The report claimed that violence in Iraq was declining, and that the occupation was improving the situation in Iraq. Petraeus claimed that fewer Iraqis were dying in violent attacks. He claimed that only 960 deaths occurred in August, as compared with 1,700 in June. But the Associated Press found that 1,809 civilian deaths occurred in August.

How did the Petraeus Report claim such a low number? Petraeus lied by omission. His report did not count violence that did not involve opposing religious sects. According to an intelligence official cited by The Washington Post, the deaths are defined as follows: "If a bullet went through the back of the head, it's sectarian," the official said. "If it went through the front, it's criminal." Petraeus hinted that even in the scenario he described, the U.S. would be involved in Iraq for another decade. With these cheap lies, the ruling class is trying to keep us in the dark about the real situation in Iraq.

The Future is in Our Hands

This history of Iraq is a case study of U.S. imperialism in action today, as it aims to expand its field of operation in search for profits. The warmongers don't care what effects their wars have on the people of the world, so long as they can profit. Today the war is in Iraq, but tomorrow it might be Iran, or any number of other regions where capitalism is attempting to maintain its grip.

The primary division in the world today, is between the few who control the financial and corporate institutions, and the many who do the work for these institutions. For the rich, the goal of all investment and production is to generate a profit. The mass misery of the world's population and the destruction of the planet is the consequence.

History is full of accounts of masses of people rising up against their oppressors, with varying degrees of success. If we understand this history, hopefully we can avoid the mistakes of the

past. One clear lesson is that the working class needs to build a revolutionary leadership that clearly represents its interests, a leadership that will take the fight to its conclusion – a total end to the exploitation of capitalism.

It is up to us to create a future based on respect and cooperation between the peoples of the world, rather than exploitation and domination. The overwhelming majority of the world's peoples can end the rule of imperialism and its wars. We can bring into being a just and humane organization of society for the benefit and wellbeing of all.