

The New War in Iraq: US Occupation Shifts to Proxy Subversion

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Since the withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq, there has been an ongoing campaign of demonization and subversion of Prime Minister Maliki. Though this effort likely began with an assassination attempt in December of 2011, it has come to a head in recent months with the warrant, flight, and subsequent trial of Vice President Hashemi. This conflict illustrates not only the deep divides that exist within the ruling power structure in Baghdad, but also the attempts by foreign powers to exert control and influence over the future of Iraq.



Image: *Current Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has walked a careful balancing act between departing US occupation forces, the foreign-interests that sent them, and establishing national sovereignty including independently determined relationships with neighboring states such as Syria and Iran.*

....Prime Minister Maliki came to power by overcoming the opposition of US puppet figures such as Allawi and Chalabi who, despite incredible financial support and propaganda, were unable to establish coalitions or even legitimate bases of support. Instead, Maliki emerged as the Shiite leader who was able to unify officials from a variety of ethnic and religious groups. At the time, this seemed a positive development for US military leadership and the Bush administration, anxious to have anyone who could exert control over Iraq.

However, in the years since then, Maliki has developed into a strong, nationalist leader who, in the interests of the Shiite majority and Iraq more generally, has exponentially expanded relations with Tehran, consolidated political control (particularly in the Kurdish North), and broken with the United States and its proxies in the GCC on issues such as Libya, Syria, and oil contracts. Naturally, this is anathema to US designs for Iraq and has lead to this concerted effort to remove, by any means necessary, Prime Minister Maliki.

Assassination Attempt a Warning To Maliki

In the midst of the withdrawal of US troops from Iraqi soil last December, a very rare event took place: a bomb exploded inside the heavily fortified Green Zone of Baghdad. Although the event garnered little international attention against the backdrop of the so-called “end of the Iraq War”, it sent a very clear message to the leadership in Baghdad – toe the US line or suffer the consequences. In the aftermath of the bombing, [Maliki stated publicly](#) that the plot was clearly an attempt on his life. However, instead of capitulating to such threats, the Prime Minister immediately denounced the episode and proceeded to meet with Iranian President Ahmadinejad. Undoubtedly, this decision conveyed to the United States that idea that Maliki would not succumb to pressure and threats.

The lessons learned from this failed assassination were significant. First and foremost, the United States and its proxies in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and elsewhere came to recognize that Maliki and his Shiite base of support in Baghdad had become more than just a thorn in the side of imperial ambitions. Rather, they were forced to admit that he and his ruling coalition had become a legitimate nationalist force. Secondly, those nations with designs to control Iraqi oil wealth, among other natural resources, were forced to admit that the traditional, strong-arm tactics of assassination and physical violence would not be effective against the entrenched and popular Maliki. Instead, they had to change the strategy from overt attacks to covert subversion.

The Hashemi Affair

When the story of Iraqi Vice President Hashemi being implicated in the operation of an assassination death squad first broke, it was immediately apparent that the issue was going to become an attempt to divide the government and destroy Prime Minister Maliki. Not only was Hashemi a representative of the Iraqiya bloc, an integral part of the fragile coalition ruling the country, but he was a Sunni. This meant that Iraq would be divided along political and religious lines. Naturally, the evolution of the crisis only furthered these initial conclusions.

Upon receiving news that an arrest warrant had been issued, [Hashemi immediately fled to the Kurdish territory](#), seeking asylum in the arms of the Barzani government in Arbil. This initial move by Hashemi signaled to the world that this conflict was part of a much larger political struggle that would pit the Shiite majority led by Maliki against much of the Sunni and Kurdish minorities. It is no secret that these divisions have been, and continue to be, the locus of power maintained in Iraq by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and their paymasters in Washington. In order to maintain their domination of Iraq's wealth and resources, they needed to get rid of Maliki and they were determined to use their agent Hashemi to do so.

Any lingering doubts about the role of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in fostering this conflict were erased when Hashemi left Arbil in the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan for [Qatar](#) followed by [Saudi Arabia](#). It was during these trips where Hashemi met with various power brokers, essentially receiving his orders from the reactionary Sunni leaders of those two nations. Hashemi had proven to be a useful pawn on the chessboard of the Middle East, in which the Gulf monarchies, always acting in the interests of their masters in Washington, seemed intent on exerting their dominance over Iraq at all costs.

The final stop on Hashemi's destabilization tour was Turkey, where he resides today. Ankara, which has its own strategic interests in Iraq, for which Maliki presents an obstacle, has provided Hashemi with safe haven, [even after Interpol issued a warrant calling for Hashemi's arrest](#). Turkey, with its large Kurdish minority and ambitions of becoming a dominant regional power, has maintained that they will not extradite Hashemi back to Baghdad where his trial continues. By providing safe haven to an international fugitive, Turkey is playing a dangerous political game, one that threatens not only their own stability, but that of the entire region.

The Propaganda of "Dictatorship"

In the last two months, as the various forces have aligned to subvert the Maliki government, the talking point has been that [Maliki is consolidating power into a dictatorship](#). Naturally, the propaganda function of such absurdities is to conflate Maliki with Saddam Hussein,

thereby delegitimizing him in the eyes of an uninformed public. In fact, as Maliki has been attacked seemingly from all sides, he has moved to consolidate control so as to maintain the fragile coalition that rules Iraq despite (not thanks to) the weak, decentralized government established by the US-imposed Iraqi Constitution. In so doing, Maliki has won many enemies while, simultaneously working to restore Iraq's reputation internationally.

The cries of "dictator" must be directly attributed to the forces of Western imperialism that control much of the international media and who seem to have no issue whatsoever with the dictatorships of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and other proxy states. Of course, this demonization of Maliki is a last-ditch effort at destabilizing his government in the wake of the string of failures already mentioned.

Having fought an aggressive and illegal war, committed billions of dollars to a reconstruction process that favored corporate and financial interests, and sought to exploit natural resources, the United States and its regional proxies have seemingly exhausted all avenues to rid themselves of the disease of Prime Minister Maliki. However, diseases often mutate, changing their form to become resistant to cures and antidotes – surviving even under extreme circumstances. To accept this analogy, we must see Maliki and his relations with Iran as having infected the imperial body and, as anti-imperialists interested in peace, prosperity and freedom for all, not just some, we must support Maliki and the Iraqi people in their ongoing struggle for true independence....

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