

US signs deal for long-term occupation of Iraq

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President Bush and the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki signed an agreement Monday paving the way for the long-term occupation of the Middle Eastern country and its transformation into a semi-colonial protectorate of the US.

The “Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship” outlines plans for the establishment of permanent US military bases in Iraq to suppress internal opposition to the US-installed regime and protect US economic and political interests throughout the region. It also provides for preferential treatment for US energy conglomerates and investors to exploit Iraq’s newly opened up oil resources.

The new agreement—signed during a secret videoconference between Bush and Maliki—without the slightest democratic pretenses in each country—exposes the repeated lies, peddled by the White House ever since the April 2003 invasion, that the US had no intention to set up permanent military bases or carry out an long-term occupation of Iraq.

The declaration calls for the current United Nations mandate—which has provided a legal fig leaf for the US occupation—to be extended one more year and thereafter to be replaced by a bilateral economic and security pact between the two countries.

The full details of the pact—including the size of the US occupying force—are to be worked out by July 31, 2008 and are scheduled to take effect in early 2009, i.e., after Bush leaves office. Although the agreement will commit US troops to remain in the country for years, if not decades, the White House insists that it will not rise to the level of a formal treaty, requiring congressional approval.

Maliki signed the declaration without any serious parliamentary debate. Sunni Arab and Shia politicians immediately denounced it, saying the agreement would lead to “US interference for years to come.” The Association of Muslim Scholars, a Sunni group, said the Iraqi signatories of the declaration would be looked on as “collaborators with the occupier.”

Under the proposed formula, Iraqi officials told the Associated Press, Iraqi forces will take charge of internal security, and US troops will relocate to bases outside the cities. They foresee at least 50,000 American troops remaining in the country indefinitely. The White House says the bilateral agreement will not contain timetables for the withdrawal of troops.

White House deputy national security advisor Lieutenant-General Douglas Lute said the declaration signaled that the US “will protect our interests in Iraq, alongside our Iraqi partners, and that we consider Iraq a key strategic partner, able to increasingly contribute to regional stability.”

US forces will protect the interests of American energy companies once the country's vast oil wealth—the second largest proven oil reserves in the world—are opened up to international and in particular US investment. This is only possible by intensifying US military repression of the Iraqi people and crushing popular opposition to the US-installed regime and the American occupation.

At the same time permanent US bases are being set up to project American military power throughout the Middle East and provide US forces increased capabilities to launch attacks against Iran, Syria and other countries.

Debka-Net-Weekly, a web site associated with Israeli military intelligence, said the US has plans to remove 100,000 troops by the end of 2009, leaving behind 50,000-70,000 in 20 huge land and air bases. "These bases," the site wrote, "are under construction; they will be secured by broad swathes of space, fortified with weaponry and remote-controlled electronic devices." US troops will be responsible for protecting Iraq's borders from "external threats," Debka reported, adding, "US air strength and special forces in these bases will have rapid deployment capabilities for reaching points outside Iraq at need."

The US launched the Iraq war to establish unchallenged domination of the Middle East and fend off the growing inroads into the energy-rich region by its economic rivals, such as China and Russia. The economic advantages of occupying Iraq are spelled out in one of the principles outlined in the new US-Iraqi declaration, which calls for "facilitating and encouraging the flow of foreign investment to Iraq, especially American investments, to contribute to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Iraq."

Another declares US support for aiding Iraq's "transition to a market economy," which includes opening up the nationalized oil industry to the control of ExxonMobil, Chevron and other US energy conglomerates.

Earlier this month the Iraqi government, guided by American legal advisors, cancelled a contract originally signed by the Saddam Hussein government in 1997 with the Russian company Lukoil, for the development of the vast oil field in Iraq's southern desert. The West Qurna fields—with estimated reserves of 11 billion barrels, the equivalent of the worldwide proven oil reserves of ExxonMobil, America's largest oil company—will now be opened to international, and in particular, US bidders.

Vladimir Tikhomirov, the chief economist at the Russian bank UralSib, told the *New York Times*, "From the Russian government perspective, Iraq is seen as occupied and its administration directed by Washington, particularly when it comes to oil. The Russians see the cancellation of the contract in Iraq as part of the US drive to keep control over the major oil fields there."

The declaration of principles is loaded with Orwellian language aimed at concealing its nakedly imperialist aims. The US—which launched an illegal war and occupation that have resulted in the virtual destruction of an entire society and the deaths of more than one million Iraqis—declares its commitment to "deter foreign aggression." All those who oppose the occupation are "terrorists" and "outlaws" who must be defeated and "uprooted" from Iraq.

The real face of the American military presence was shown this week when US troops fired on vehicles at roadblocks in Baghdad and north of the Iraqi capital, killing at least five

people, including three women and a child, in two separate shootings.

The commitment to a long-term occupation hardly provoked a murmur from the Democratic Party. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi criticized Bush for planning to leave office with a “US army tied down in Iraq and stretched to the breaking point, with no clear exit strategy.”

While opposing Bush for failing to efficiently wage the war the Democrats defend the same economic interests as the Republicans and have made it clear they will not end the occupation if they take control of the White House in 2009. In fact the military scenario envisaged in the deal signed by Bush corresponds to the bipartisan plans being worked out between the Bush administration and the Democrats for a “post-surge Iraq.”

Leading Democrats, such as presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, have argued for the reduction of US forces and their redeployment from the cities to “over-the-horizon” positions where they could strike opponents of the US-backed regime, as well as Iran. Clinton in particular has argued that pulling US troops out of the cities would reduce US casualties, thereby making the long-term occupation of Iraq more politically palatable in the US, while still keeping forces available to defend US economic interests.

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