DIVIDE AND RULE:
The Hidden Conflict in Iraq

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Abstract:

There are reported attempts designs of U.S. and its Western allies to create a "New Middle East", through divisions within the populations of the Middle East and Central Asia through ethno-cultural, religious, sectarian, national, and political differentiations & demarcations. Apart from fuelling ethnic tensions, such as, those between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq, a sectarian divide is being deliberately cultivated within the ranks of the people of the Middle East which consider themselves Muslims. This divide is being fostered between Shia and Sunni Muslims by the U.S., British, and Israeli intelligence apparatus by recruiting various groups and leaders from these respective communities. Evidence exists that the roots of the Iraqi civil conflict is political rather than sectarian, and mainly between the separatists and nationalists rather than Shia-Sunni conflict.

Introduction

The policy of "divide and rule" is as old as the Roman Empire. Christian West implemented ruthlessly this policy during its colonial onslaught on the rest of the world. Evolution of Western nationalism based on a narrow definition of shared religion, ethnicity, language, culture or history after centuries of religious and ethnic wars was then employed to divide multi religious and pluralistic empires and kingdoms in the East and South during its crusade of colonial wars and expansion, shrouded as "civilizing mission" or "white man's burden" or "saving the soul" by converting natives to Christianity. Europe and Orthodox Russia became self proclaimed 'Guardians of Christians' or nationalities like Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, Armenians and others to divide and break up the Ottoman empire. The ongoing onslaught on Iraq is continuation of the

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same old imperialistic strategy. If the U.S. and its Western allies are successful in its current efforts to divide the Muslims by pitting Shi'ites against Sunnis it will revitalize the old colonial tactic of divide and conquer, and maintain the domination of the Middle East by authoritarian elites allied with the U.S. and the international energy industry.

The Tragedy unleashed by the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq defies description. It has been one vast extended crime against the Iraqi people, and most of it has occurred unnoticed by the American people and the media.[1] According to the most recent findings of ORB, the British polling agency that has been tracking public opinion in Iraq since 2005, the number of "excess deaths" in Iraq since the U.S. invasion is more than 1,000,000.[2] "Iraq is the fastest-growing refugee crisis in the world," according to UNHCR more than 4.7 million Iraqis have left their homes, many in dire need of humanitarian care. Of these, more than 2.7 million Iraqis are displaced internally, while more than 2 million have fled to neighboring states, particularly Syria and Jordan.[3] Basic foods and necessities are beyond the reach of ordinary Iraqis because of massive inflation whereas unemployment remains roughly 60–70 percent nationally.[4] An Oxfam International report released in July, 2007 says that 70 percent of Iraqis lack access to safe drinking water, and 43 percent live on less than a dollar a day while 8 million Iraqis are in need of emergency assistance.[5]

The underlying trend is clear: each day the occupation continues, life gets worse for most Iraqis. Rather than stemming civil war or sectarian conflict, the occupation is spurring it. Rather than being a source of stability, the occupation is the major source of instability and chaos. Certainly in Iraq, although there were always tensions between

Sunni and Shia, the notion that you had this kind of sectarian warfare, that you could ever get into this kind of bloodletting between the two groups — they intermarried; it's a tribal society basically; many of the tribes had fifty-fifty Sunni and Shia — there was never an issue like it is now.

Pre-War Sunni-Shia Relations

Until the 1980s, the dominant view of contemporary political analysts held that Iraq was badly split along sectarian lines. The claim was that the Sunnis—though a minority in Iraq have subjected the majority, the Shias to a systematic discrimination. [6] According to the prevailing belief, the Shias would drive the Sunnis from power, if once afforded an opportunity to do so. [7]

There was some element of truth in this notion. For many years Iraq was ruled by-and-large by Arab Sunnis who tended to come from a restricted area around Baghdad, Mosul, and Ar Rutbah—the so-called Golden Triangle. In the 1980s, not only was President Saddam Hussain a Sunni, but he was also the vice chairman of the ruling Baath Party. In addition, the top posts in the security services have usually been held by Sunnis, and most of the army's corps commanders have been Sunnis. It is also true that the most depressed region of the country is the south, where the bulk of the Shias reside.[8] [But to hold that Shias were conspicuous by their absence in the army or other departments of the government would be far from the truth.]

Nonetheless, the theory of sectarian strife was undercut by the behavior of Iraq's Shia community during Iran's 1982 invasion and the fighting thereafter. Although about three-quarters of the lower ranks of the army were Shias, as of early 1988, no general insurrection of Iraqi Shias had occurred. Even in periods of major setback for the Iraqi army, such as, the Al-Faw debacle in 1986—the Shias have continued staunchly to defend their nation and the Baath regime. Iraq faced the traditional Shia-Sunni dichotomy. The war had demonstrated the ability of Iraqi Shia to put nationalist commitment above the sectarian loyalties.[9] They have done so despite intense propaganda barrages mounted by the Iranians, calling on them to join the Islamic revolution.

It appears, then, that, however important sectarian affiliation may have been in the past, in the late 1980s nationalism was the basic determiner of loyalty. In the case of Iraq's Shias, it should be noted that they are Arabs, not Persians, and that they have been the camp followers of the Persians for the last so many centuries. The Iraqi government has skillfully exploited this age-old apathy in its propaganda, publicizing the war as part of the ancient struggle between the Arab and Persian

empires.[10] For example, Baathist publicists regularly called the war a modern day *Qadisiyah*.[11]

The real tension in Iraq in the later 1980s was between the majority of the population (Sunnis as well as Shias), for whom religious beliefs and practices were of significant values; and the secular Baathists, rather than between Sunnis and Shias. Although, critics say that the Shias had been underrepresented in government posts in the period of the monarchy.

> *"The main Muslim sects of Islam, Sunnis, and Shias or Shi'ites, dominate the culture of Iraq. The majority in the country are the Shias, but the minority, the Sunnis, ran the country both before and during Saddam Hussein's regime. There was much discrimination against the Shias."[12]*

However, neutral observers believe that in the late 1980s under Saddam Hussein, Shias were represented at all levels of the ruling Baath party roughly in proportion to their ratio in the population.[13] For example, of the eight top Iraqi leaders who in early 1988 sat with Hussain on the Revolutionary Command Council--Iraq's highest governing body, three were Arab Shias, three were Arab Sunnis, one was an Arab Christian, and one a Kurd. On the Regional Command Council (the ruling body of the party), Shias were actually predominant. During the war, a number of highly competent Shia officers have been promoted to corps commanders. The general who turned back the initial Iranian invasions of Iraq in 1982 was a Shia.[14]

In summary, prior to the war the Baath had taken steps toward integrating the Shias. The war placed inordinate demands on the regime for manpower, demands that could only be met by levying the Shia community and this strengthened the regime's resolve to further the integration process. In early 1988, it seemed likely that when the war

ends, the Shias would emerge as full citizens-- assuming that the Baath survives the conflict.

Divide and Rule: A Colonial Strategy

Divide and rule is not new to the United States, nor is it new as imperial strategy. Even before the U.S. existed, colonial strategy was committed to it. In *A People's History of the United States*, the historian Howard Zinn quotes Gary Nash, who writes of the period in the 1750's when native American's and blacks greatly outnumbered white Europeans,

> *"Indian uprisings that punctuated the colonial period and a succession of slave uprisings and insurrectionary plots that were nipped in the bud kept South Carolinians sickeningly aware that only through the greatest vigilance and through policies designed to keep their enemies divided could they hope to remain in control of the situation."*[15]

From the founding of the United States, the federal government has relied on subterfuge, skullduggery, and secret operations to advance American interests. "The post-invasion stage in Iraq also is an interesting case study of fanning discontent among enemies. Like their SOG predecessors in Vietnam, U.S. elite forces in Iraq turned to fostering infighting among their Iraqi adversaries on the tactical and operational level".[16]

The history of the Cold War also shows that, when dealing with an opposing political ideology, a strategy of separating its moderate adherents from its extremist adherents can sometimes be successful. In Europe, in particular, the United States was very successful in separating moderate Marxists—socialists and social democrats—from extremist Marxists—communists—during the 1950s, and this division largely persisted for the rest of the Cold War. This splitting strategy was not very effective in the Third World, however. There, moderate Marxists—the

"Third Way"—rarely existed or, if they did, they were soon marginalized by the extremist Marxists or repressed by the authoritarian, anticommunist regimes that were the allies of the United States.

During the Cold War, the most consequential splitting strategy used by the United States was the one directed at the Sino-Soviet bloc, which was initiated by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in the early 1970s. Of course, the Sino-Soviet bloc had already been split by a serious conflict by the time the United States got around to recognizing and exploiting that momentous reality, but the Nixon administration did take advantage of it between 1971-73 in its efforts to bring about an end to the Vietnam War. Subsequent administrations also made the Sino-Soviet split a major basis for their strategies toward the communist powers, and it was a major factor in the ultimate victory of the United States over the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

Most of today's conflicts in present day Asia and Africa may be traced to imperial/colonial powers that occupied these lands, and carved them up for the benefit of the conquering Europeans. Those who resisted were called "terrorists" for defending their native land and their way of life against foreign invaders. The same cavalry units now force Iraqis daily to lie face down in the land of their ancestors and describe those fighting to free their country from the occupying forces as "terrorists". The Iraqis, other Arabs and Iranians are the new "American Indians", and those who collaborate with the Bush administration are like the good Indians who helped the Americans fight and defeat bad Indians. Carving up Iraq will be a confirmation of this policy of divide and rule.

> *"By drawing analogies with some of the United States' Cold War strategies, we can identify three possible strategies to divide and diminish the global Islamist threat. These splitting strategies are based upon three different divisions that can be found within the Muslim world; moderate Muslims versus*

extremist Islamists; Sunnis versus Shias; and Muslim ethnic militias versus Islamist terrorist networks."[17]

Like all the imperial powers the major concern of U.S. and its Western Allies is to maintain superiority, control and influence over the region, they have placed corrupt Arab leaders into positions of power and supported the overthrow of those that are not seen as favorable. This has also served to keep their populations at bay, in return for militarization, power and personal wealth of the elite. Sometimes this has been done in the name of fighting communism. The common theme underlying it though has been to control important natural resources such as oil.

> *"One major concern for the United States is oil. While oil production in the United States, Mexico, and the North Sea is declining, U.S. consumption is predicted to increase by one-third over the next 20 years. By 2020, two-thirds of all U.S. oil will be imported, and since 65% of the world's remaining oil reserves are in the Middle East, one doesn't have to be a conspiracy theorist to conclude a strategy of divide and conquer is aimed at keeping strategic control of those resources."[18]*

The policy of imperialism in occupied Iraq is not only confined to administering regular doses of mass humiliations to the Iraqis, lest they forget that the world's mightiest military power is suzerain over them. In a typical replica of the 19th century British and French imperialism, the American version of it is also trying to offspring a small group or class of loyal Iraqis who would be prepared to do their bidding whenever and howsoever required. Arab leaders are seen by the public as American puppets who have no standing of their own. Some even liken them to the medieval Arab princes who helped the Crusaders occupy Arab land.[19]

Post-war Iraq: The Shias vs. Sunnis

While the majority of Iraqis know that the current Shia-Sunni tension did not exist before 2003, no one can deny that after five years of U.S. occupation, sectarian tension is now a reality. Sectarianism is another calamity that was brought to Iraq by the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Iraq's sectarian bloodshed is "Made in the USA" Erik Leaver and Raed Jarrar, writing in Asia Times say, "Iraq never had a history of sectarian conflicts. U.S. policy choices provided a perfect road map for starting one."[20]

> *"When the United States ousted Saddam Hussein in April 2003, crime spiked and full-scale looting erupted. But there were still no signs of sectarian clashes. That quickly changed, however, as the U.S. administration assumed control over Iraq."[21]*

The U.S.-led invasion did not only destroy the Baath political regime, it also annihilated the entire public sector including education, health care, food rations, social security, and the armed forces. The Iraqi public sector was a great example of how millions of Iraqis: Arabs and Kurds, Sunnis and Shias, Muslims and Christians, religious and secular, all worked together in running the country. The myth that the former Iraqi government was a "Sunni-led dictatorship" was created by the U.S. government.[22] Even the Iraqi political regime was not "Sunni-led," let alone the rest of the public sector. A good way to demystify this myth is through a close look at the famous deck of cards of the 55 most wanted Iraqi leaders.[23] The cards had the pictures of Saddam, his two sons, and the rest of the political leadership which most Iraqis would recognize as the heads of the political regime. What is noteworthy is that 36 of the 55 were Shia. In fact, the two vice presidents were a Christian and a Shia Kurd.

According to the Iraqi mainstream narrative, the foreign occupation is the major reason and cause for violence and destruction. Foreign intervention is not only destroying Iraq's infrastructure, but it is also splitting Iraq's formerly integrated society.

> *"Occupation has left no room for any initiative independent of the officially sanctioned political process; for a peaceful opposition or civil society that could create networks to bridge the politically manufactured divide. . . ."[24]*

Polls have consistently shown that a substantial majority believe that the presence of US troops has increased violence in Iraq. PIPA's September 2006 poll found that Iraqis believe, by an overwhelming margin of 78 to 21 percent that the US military presence is "provoking more conflict that it is preventing."[25] A survey conducted by the Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies in November 2006 produced similar results, showing that nearly 66 percent of respondents thought the security situation would improve and violence would decrease if US forces were to leave.[26] Such findings were confirmed by British research firm Opinion Research Business, according to which, a majority of Iraqis feels "the security situation in Iraq will get better in the immediate weeks following a withdrawal of the MNF."[27] The U.S. occupation has destabilized Iraq and the Middle East. Stability will not return until the occupation has ended.[28]

Today all of the reasons that have been offered for why the U.S. cannot afford to withdraw troops from Iraq are fake. The fact is, the troops are staying in Iraq for much different reasons than the ones being hyped by political elites and a subservient establishment press. They are staying to save face for a U.S. political elite that cares nothing for the lives of Iraqis (or for that matter the .S. soldiers); to pursue the futile goal of turning Iraq into a reliable client state strategically located near the

major energy resources and shipping routes of the Middle East, home to two-thirds of world oil reserves, and Western and Central Asia; to serve as a base for the projection of U.S. military power in the region, particularly in the growing conflict between the United States and Iran; and to maintain the legitimacy of U.S. imperialism, which needs the pretext of a global war on terror to justify its further military intervention, expanded military budgets, concentration of executive power, and restrictions on civil liberties. The U.S. military did not invade and occupy Iraq to spread democracy, check the spread of weapons of mass destruction, rebuild the country, or stop civil war. In fact, the troops remain in Iraq today to deny self-determination and genuine democracy to the Iraqi people, who have made it clear, whether they are Shia or Sunni, that they want U.S. troops to leave Iraq immediately; feel less safe as a result of the occupation; think the occupation is spurring not suppressing sectarian strife; and support armed attacks on occupying troops and Iraqi security forces, who are seen not as independent but as collaborating with the occupation.[29]

In 2005, a secret military poll by the British Ministry of Defense revealed that a large proportion of Iraqis (45 percent) believed attacks against US and UK troops were justified.[30] Since January 2006, the support for attacks against US forces has increased substantially and as of September 2006 reached 61 percent, with strong majorities in support of attacks amongst both Shia and Sunni repondents.[31]

> *"In Iraq, in contrast to the embedded lie that the killings are now almost entirely sectarian, 70 per cent of the 1,666 bombs exploded by the resistance in July were directed against the American occupiers and 20 per cent against the puppet police force. Civilian casualties amounted to 10 per cent. In other words, unlike the collective punishment meted out by the US, such as the killing of several thousand people in*

Fallujah, the resistance is fighting basically a military war and it is winning. That truth is suppressed, as it was in Vietnam."[32]

Approval for such attacks is highly correlated with the belief that the US plans to have permanent bases in Iraq.[33] PIPA points out that "if the US were to make a commitment to withdraw according to a timetable, support for attacks would diminish."[34]

In addition, Iraqis are fighting among each other over fundamental questions about the future of their country, but the central conflict is not between Sunnis and Shias, it is between Iraqi separatists and nationalists.

"*The major schism in Iraqi politics is not between Sunni and Shia or supporters of the Iraqi government and "anti-government forces," nor is it a clash of "moderates" against "radicals"; the defining battle for Iraq at the political level today is between nationalists trying to hold the Iraqi state together and separatists backed, so far, by the United States and Britain.".*[35]

[And this is also the secret agenda of Israel—division of Iraq suits their ambitions of Greater Israel]

Unlike other countries in the region such as Lebanon, the Iraqi sectarian tension is still reversible, because it was just ignited by foreign invaders only five years ago. More importantly, it isn't main driving force fueling the Iraqi-Iraqi conflict. This "hidden" conflict is in fact, between separatists and nationalists.

The "Hidden" Conflict: Separatists vs. Nationalists

The separatists favor a "soft partition" of Iraq into at least three zones with strong regional governments, similar to the semiautonomous Kurdish "state" in Northern Iraq; they are thriving on foreign intervention (Iranian, U.S. or other powers' influence); they favor privatizing Iraq's massive energy reserves and ceding substantial control

of the country's oil sector to regional authorities. Nationalists reject any foreign interference in Iraq's affairs and they favor a strong technocratic central government in Baghdad that is not based on sectarian voting blocs. They favor centralized control over the development of Iraq's oil and gas reserves while keeping them nationalized.

> *"The continuing occupation of Iraq and the allocation of Iraq's resources -- especially its massive oil and natural gas deposits -- are the defining issues that now separate an increasingly restless bloc of nationalists in the Iraqi parliament from the administration of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whose government is dominated by Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish separatists."[36]*

This Iraqi-Iraqi conflict is in many ways similar to the U.S. civil war: Iraqis who are for keeping a central government are fighting against other Iraqis who want to secede. But the major difference is that the United States was not under a foreign occupation that was destroying nationalists and funding and training separatists. Numerous polls that were conducted over the past few years in Iraq show that a majority of Iraqis from diverse backgrounds tend to be more nationalist than separatist. A majority of the population are for a complete U.S. withdrawal, for keeping a strong central government in Baghdad, and against privatizing and decentralizing Iraq's natural resources.
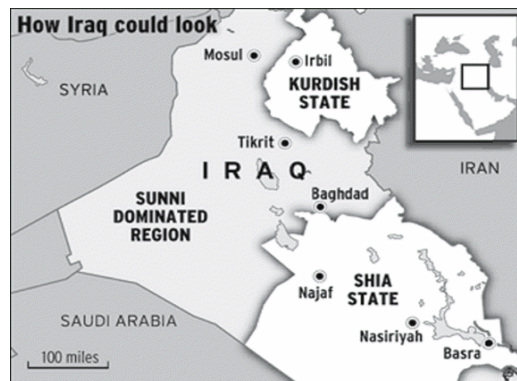
In September 2006, a World Public Opinion poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland confirmed the conclusions of the State Department poll.[37] According to the poll, 71 percent of Iraqis wanted their government to ask for the withdrawal of foreign forces within a year or less.[38] Compared to previous polls, Iraqis' urgency for withdrawal had grown and support for an open-ended presence had dropped considerably.[39]

More surprisingly to U.S. audiences, this nationalist-separatist conflict is prevalent inside the Iraqi government itself. The Iraqi executive branch (the cabinet and the presidency) are completely controlled by separatists (including Shias, Sunnis, Kurds, seculars and others). But the legislative branch (the parliament) is controlled by nationalists (including Sunnis, Shias, seculars, Christians, Yazidis, etc.) who enjoy a small but crucially important majority.

The last couple of years witnessed numerous examples of how the Bush administration systematically took the side of separatists in the Iraqi executive branch against nationalists in the elected legislative branch, repeatedly bypassing the Iraqi parliament. In each of these cases, there was the potential for reaching compromises that would have satisfied both nationalists and separatists. However, the aggressive support of the U.S. government for the separatist executive branch against the parliament has made it impossible for Iraqis to settle their differences.

Hassan Nasrallah believed that President Bush's goal was the drawing of a new map for the region. They want the partition of Iraq. There is ethnic and sectarian cleansing. The daily killing and displacement which is taking place in Iraq aims at achieving three Iraqi

parts, which will be sectarian and ethnically pure as a prelude to the partition of Iraq.

> *"I can say that President Bush is lying when he says he does not want Iraq to be partitioned. All the facts occurring now on the ground make you swear he is dragging Iraq to partition. And a day will come when he will say, 'I cannot do anything, since the Iraqis want the partition of their country and I honor the wishes of the people of Iraq."*[40]

Understanding these nuances of the Iraqi-Iraqi conflict reveals how the war is a political struggle that will end as soon as the U.S. withdraws, not a religious war that will intensify after Iraqis take their country back. The United States is not playing the role of a peace-keeping force, or a convener of reconciliation. It is seen by a majority of Iraqis as one side of the conflict and will never be a part of the solution.

> *"Iraqis of all sectarian and ethnic groups believe that the U.S. military invasion is the primary root of the violent differences among them, and see the departure of "occupying forces" as the key to national reconciliation, according to focus groups conducted for the U.S. military last month."*[41]

This obsession with sects informed the U.S. approach to Iraq from day one of the occupation, but it was not how Iraqis saw themselves, at least, not until very recently. Iraqis were not primarily Sunnis or Shias; they were Iraqis first, and their sectarian identities did not become politicized until the Americans occupied their country, treating Sunnis as the bad guys and Shias as the good guys. [42] There were no blocs of "Sunni Iraqis" or "Shia Iraqis" before the war, just like there was no "Sunni Triangle" or "Shia South" until the Americans imposed ethnic and sectarian identities onto Iraq's regions.

The Shia-Sunni Divide: Myths and Reality

As the US-led occupation of Iraq enters its fifth year, conflicts and political rivalries in the region appear to be assuming a sectarian edge unseen since the 1982-1989 war between Iraq and Iran.

The debate over why this should be so is increasingly dominated by two approaches. Proponents of the first argue that concepts corruption, autocracy, occupation, nationalism, etc., can no longer explain the range of conflicts and alliances within the region. It is, rather, old feuds between Shia and Sunnis which will forge attitudes and define prejudices.

> *Sectarian identity will play an increasingly significant role in drawing political lines and determining regional alliances, shaping not just how states and sub-state actors behave but the political attitudes of ordinary people as well.* [43]

Sectarian-inspired conflicts, along the lines of those seen in Iraq, will come to constitute a major fault line in Middle East politics. Seen from this perspective, the political conduct of Iran or Hizbullah can be explained as a reawakening of Shia identity.

By the same token Saudi Arabia's condemnation of Hizbullah as provoking Israel's attack on Lebanon can be reduced to Riyadh's concern over growing Shia influence in Lebanon. Supporters of such a view would also argue that the Saudi Arabian mediation that resulted in the Mecca agreement[44] between the two main Palestinian factions was also a product of Riyadh's desire to reassert Sunni influence.

> *"One reason, the Saudi-brokered pact largely is that Saudi Arabia — as a leader in the Arab world — wanted to help end the Palestinian-on-Palestinian violence by Hamas and Fatah. But another big reason, is that the war in Iraq has intensified the split between Sunnis and Shiites, and deepened a power struggle between the Sunni royal family of Saudi Arabia, and Iran, which is largely Shiite."* [45]

Concerned over Iran's growing influence in Palestine, the Saudis were determined to reassert themselves. Indyk argued, Hamas may well be viewed as extremists by Saudi Arabia, but at least they are Sunni extremists. The U.S. views the Middle East as a battle between the moderates against the extremists. But our regional allies see this as a divide between Sunnis and Shias, and Sunni extremists like Hamas may be extremists, but they are Sunnis first.[46]

Proponents of the second approach, while acknowledging the role played by sectarian identity in shaping the attitudes of some political actors, argue that other factors, including the foreign policy goals of the countries involved, state structures and chronic regional problems such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, political reform and Washington's Middle East policies, all play a part. While Saudi Arabia views Iran's influence over Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian issue with increasing alarm, they argue, Saudi's acts less out of sectarian motives than concern over the regional balance of power. Iran's foreign policy, they say, with the exception of Iraq, has transcended communal loyalties to embrace causes that were once the exclusive domain of Arab nationalist forces.

While there appears to be a consensus that sectarian violence is no longer limited to Iraq but has expanded to influence developments from the Gulf to Lebanon, public debate in the Arab world offers interesting insights about how both sides view the possible repercussions of deepening sectarian divisions.

The consensus in both Sunni and Shia circles appears to be that attempts to emphasize Sunni- Shia rivalries are intended to deflect attention from both the US occupation of Iraq and continuing Israeli aggression. That the US is working to fuel such tensions is almost an article of faith for Muslims on both sides. In its attempt to create an anti-

Iran alliance, the US is resorting to a strategy which aims to raise the spectre of sectarianism across the Muslim world. "There is a huge campaign through the media throughout the world to put each side up against the other and all this is being run by American and Israeli intelligence."[47]

Even before Seymour Hersh blew the whistle in *The New Yorker* on Washington's role in fuelling Sunni-Shia tensions, leading Shia and Sunni figures had warned that the US was behind much of the sectarian violence in Iraq and Lebanon.

> *"One of the long-standing goals of such neoconservative intellectuals has been to see the Middle East broken up into smaller ethnic or sectarian mini-states, which would include not only large stateless nationalities like the Kurds, but Maronite Christians, Druze, Arab Shi'ites, and others. Such a policy comes not out of respect for the right of self-determination – indeed, the neocons have been steadfast opponents of the Palestinians' desire for statehood, even alongside a secure Israel – but out of an imperial quest for divide-and-rule."[48]*

Hussein Fadlullah, critic of US policy in the region accused Washington of replacing its plans to spread democracy with schemes to incite Shia- Sunni sedition. Continuing rhetoric about a Shia revival and false stories about Shiisation of Sunnis were all part of a scheme to divide the two communities. The Muslim Ummah, needs to understand that the problems are not between Sunni and Shia but between Islam and the American administration.[49]

Expressing similar views, Mohamed Mahdi Akef, the supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, has criticized the increasingly vociferous rhetoric about the rise of Shia influence and called for Sunni-Shia unity in the face of common enemies. He blamed the enemies of Islam and the activities of "foreign occupiers" for the divisions which

have recently appeared and the spirit of hatred which has recently spread.[50]

For these leaders, Hersh's revelations[51] about the US propagation of sectarian divisions in an attempt to make the case against Iran came as no surprise. The fact that the CIA is financing through Al-Siniora's government Salafi groups in Palestinian camps in Lebanon questions US motives in fuelling sectarian strife. The US endgame is to weaken Islam from within and divert attention from targeting US interests to targeting each other.

If the Bush administration is successful in its current efforts to divide Islam by pitting Shi'ites against Sunnis it will revitalize the old colonial tactic of divide and conquer, and maintain the domination of the Middle East by authoritarian elites allied with the U.S. and the international energy industry.

Conclusion

"Divide and Rule" seems to be central to the U.S. strategy to controlling Iraq and the Middle East region as whole. The U.S. has used this strategy in other conflicts, and the closest ally of the United States perfected "divide and rule" during its history as a colonial power. The British typically played one tribe or ethnic group against another to maintain control of their colonies with a minimal number of British troops. For example, the British used 'divide and rule' strategies to gain control over India, keeping its people divided along lines of religion, language, and caste. The divisions created or enhanced by Great Britain still cause problems in some of its former colonies.

The division of the Middle East has long been seen as a means of countering the threat of pan-Arab nationalism and, more recently, pan-Islamist movements. Given the mosaic of ethnicities and sects in the

Middle East, with various groupings having mixed together within both urban and rural settings for many generations, the establishment of such ethnic or sectarian mini-states would almost certainly result in forced population transfers, ethnic cleansing, and other human suffering.

Much of Iraq's current divisions can be traced to the decision of U.S. occupation authorities immediately following the conquest to abolish the Iraqi army and purge the government bureaucracy both bastions of secularism thereby creating a vacuum that was soon filled by sectarian parties and militias. In addition, the U.S. occupation authorities in an apparent effort of divide-and-rule encouraged sectarianism by dividing up authority based not on technical skills or ideological affiliation but ethnic and religious identity.

The various U.S. military and political strategies in Iraq are the primary cause of the continuing sectarianism. The occupation forces and their methods are dividing Iraqi groups, and rather than promoting reconciliation, are encouraging increases in violence, power struggles, and strife. Thus, the military strategy is actually making the political process more difficult by failing to provide the actors the space needed for any progression towards reconciliation. The ultimate and tragic irony, is that this strategy also makes the possibility for a much larger civil war far more likely.

The U.S. war against Vietnam was lost by 1968, if not earlier, but continued for years after, with millions of lives lost as a consequence. One must not allow a repeat of that tragic history. The Vietnam War also has another lesson to teach us: that when people speak out and organize, they can deter even the most powerful and reckless government. The war against the people of Indochina would certainly have lasted even longer and might have spread even farther, had concerted opposition at home

and internationally not forced the United States to retreat. That is a lesson badly needed to relearn and put into practice today.

End Notes:

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