

ONLY HE IS A MARXIST who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is the touchstone on which the real understanding and recognition of Marxism is to be tested.

V.I. Lenin

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Fake-“left” confusion and “condemn terror” betrayals exposed as revolutionary Iraq insurgency pushes back the disgusting Maliki US stooge regime in Baghdad. Imperialist duplicity, hypocrisy and failure also exposed, underlining the importance of DEFEAT for imperialist domination and warmongering as a key to opening up world proletarian consciousness to vital Marxist-Leninist understanding. Religious and sectarian ideologies are not sufficient for

The extraordinary declaration of a “Caliphate” in Iraq is not a Marxist answer to the growing chaos and slump warmongering of capitalism’s catastrophic historic failure but it strikes a blow against Western domination of the Middle East which shakes it profoundly.

Condemning this as “just jihadism and barbarity” as the fake-“lefts” of all shades are rushing to do, is to capitulate to Western propaganda and demonisation.

Firstly it is capitalism’s non-stop fascist torturing warmongering and brutality which initiates and is the cause of the barbarity in the world, to which such movements are just a response, and however ruthless, on nothing even approaching the scale of the blanket bombing, arbitrary concentration camp round-ups, torture, renditions, death squadism, death-drone killings, “collective punishment”, murderous “fun shootings” by Western troops, and indiscriminate civilian massacres which

have **always** been part of imperialist tyrannical domination, but have been stepped-up even further in the “endless war” against “terror” of the last two decades (deliberately created on lies and WMD pretences etc).

On top of that is the daily slow violence of sweatshop conditions everywhere, leaving billions in near starvation and malnutrition (including tens of hundreds of thousands of children starved to death annually), appalling sanitary conditions, enforced ignorance, illiteracy and child-labour, and routinely killing them by the thousands in industrial accidents (like the Bangladesh clothing factory collapses).

Secondly, it fails to see, or writes-off, one of the most important of historical developments, the growing international revolt against Western domination which has spread, and continues to expand far and wide through the Third World, including Somalia and Kenya, Nigeria, Yemen, Bahrain, Mali, Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Tunisia and Egypt among

ending capitalism and establishing planned socialism, but their revolutionary spirit is the form much (but not all) rapidly growing spontaneous Third World rebellion is now taking. Denouncing it plays into the hands of imperialist “crusading” demonisation and “anti-extremism” counter-revolution. But to completely end the greatest catastrophic failure and World War disaster in all history requires the revolutionary overthrow of all capitalism. Build Leninism

many others, not only in “terrorism” and suicide attacks but mass street revolt such as Cairo.

Neither is this simply a “Muslim” phenomenon as the east Ukraine anti-fascist fight makes clear, or the Red-shirt movement in Thailand, continuing Maoist revolution in Nepal, the constant Maoist battling in India and the working class anti-imperialism in Latin America (militantly willing to defend reformist gains if hampered by non-revolutionary leadership currently).

Chaotic though this spontaneous world rebellion is, and often using methods or tactics that Leninism would usually not think the best, or which are even counter-productive, these are all expressions of an enormous upwelling of anger and frustration everywhere against the endless tyranny and slave-level exploitation imposed upon the world by monopoly capitalist dominance and striking increasing blows against it.

While such movements are not the answer in themselves to the world imperialist crisis, the shattering of the Empire’s fascist bluster and “all powerful” façade

is an essential part of the tectonic shifts in worldwide consciousness everywhere which will eventually open up the possibility for conscious Marxist revolutionary leadership to develop on a mass scale (once more).

Only a scientific Leninist movement around clearly agreed revolutionary perspectives can unite all the disparate oppressed elements in the world, to inspire and guide the total overturn of imperialism needed to establish a planned socialist world, and stop the world war disaster the Empire is dragging the world into to evade and escape its catastrophic crisis, the unstoppable meltdown that the entire production-for-private-profit economic order has come to.

That lead will not emerge from the fake-“lefts” of all shades who avoid and cover-up the struggle to understand the world, and as usual have universally capitulated one way or another to the hurricane pressure of Western “condemnation” of the “terrorism” and hypocritical concern about alleged “war crimes”.

The Trotskyists sneer at “reactionary Islam”, and the

museum-Stalinists and their offshoots write-off the struggle as “jihadist scum serving western interests” or even, absurdly, as “all organised by the CIA” (now allegedly responsible single-handed for a worldwide ferment of anti-Western upheaval and trouble from the US morale shattering 9/11 attacks over a decade ago, to the widespread international revolts of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia).

Of course Western subversion, surveillance, secret infiltration and covert interference is increasing all the time but this is petty bourgeois defeatism and “conspiracy theorising” gone haywire, missing what is right in front of their noses (mostly deliberately, to excuse their craven lining up with imperialism – even supporting the Egyptian military coup and its massacres as an alleged “step forwards” for the masses – *Lalkar/Proletarian*). This must be the first ruling class in world history (according to this view) actually to organise the growing spontaneous revolt **against itself**, which threatens its writ everywhere, demands massive resources to contain and threatens to go out of control constantly.

Such a picture of overwhelming capitalist omniscience and control – (and corresponding contempt for the capabilities of the Third World masses who by implication are **not** generating the upheavals, despite being ready to carry out numerous self-sacrificing suicide and military attacks (for the CIA)) – fits entirely with the narrow petty bourgeois view of the world from the fake-“left” groups, constantly in thrall to the ruling class despite their self-ascribed “revolutionary” credentials, and utterly unable to see or grasp the possibility of a world where it no longer exists.

Neither, despite occasional academic articles on “Marx’s economics” do they really grasp and put forward as the central factor driving all world history, the brick wall the contradictions of capitalism’s greed and profit system have brought it to, and which demand its overturn as the only possible war forwards for humanity, a crisis which broke into

the open finally in 2008 and which continues to unravel despite all the smoke-and-mirrors pretences of the ruling class that the “recovery” is underway.

Only the non-stop printing of “magic money” Quantitative Easing for the bankers has salvaged the West from utter disaster.

That is totally unsustainable – or why could not everyone simply create their own Mickey Mouse fivers and go out and spend them instead of being forced into dire austerity workhouse conditions, even in the once-privileged West???

Total war is where the ruling class is taking the world to try and escape from the historical catastrophe the internal contradictions of its system have brought it to.

Now the victories of the Sunni Islamist movement are exposing the “left” cravenness ever further.

Instead of lining up with imperialism what needs to be understood is an objective assessment of what has actually happened.

Takeover of city after city by the highly organised insurgents of the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIS) and routing of the American trained Iraqi army, are gigantic blows to the Empire’s “shock and awe” plans to bully the entire world into continuing acceptance of “topdog” US rule, despite its total bankruptcy historically.

It is the **defeat** for Western “interests” and its world war intimidation plans which is the important factor in the extraordinary surge of the ISIS fighters whatever its superficial religious form, sectarian origins and past mistakes (from a revolutionary socialist point of view).

Fighting the Hezbollah in Syria, itself a movement with an excellent record of anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism, (which the ISIS also declares to be its aims), would not appear to make any sense for example, and the apparent origins of the movement in the manipulated struggle sponsored and provoked by the West against the Syrian Assad regime (to deal with a recalcitrant anti-Zionist regime deemed a “rogue state” i.e. not sufficiently compliant with Western demands – and to help contain and head-off the 2011 Egyptian

revolutionary upsurge), just as little.

But whatever such beginnings and confusions, sections of the capitalist ruling class have long expressed fears that the manipulated movements were likely to cut loose, trying instead to find and fund “more moderate” elements to create appropriately stooge regimes.

Much of the Syrian upheaval, has clearly have gone out of control.

The US ruling class reputedly does not “do irony” but is seeing just that on a historic scale in the latest revolts, partially built on the finance and arms poured into Syria by the US and its reactionary feudal Arab stooges in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf (and perhaps even trained by them).

Such attempted manipulation will increasingly backfire for the Empire because that is the nature of the historic period, in which capitalism’s once progressive role has turned into its opposite, hampering human development and threatening its destruction.

The ripening of the internal contradictions in existing capitalist society, and most of all in the growing awareness and frustration at its monstrous unfairness and inequality, with the few luxuriating in ludicrous, indolent, philistine wasteful and largely pointless luxury while the billions it oppresses can barely survive, makes its existence intolerable.

For all its overwhelming fire power and rising and increasing Nazi belligerence, which will never stop while it continues to rule, whatever imperialism touches will continuously turn to dust.

Movement after movement, from the Islamic resistance fostered by US money and arms in Afghanistan to trap and demoralise revisionist Moscow’s support for the 1980s socialist regime there, to the Iranian Ayatollahocracy, slid into place in 1979’s spontaneous uprising against the Shah and his Savak secret police state, to head off more communist-minded leadership, have cut loose and turned at least partially against imperialist dominance, as ten years of still extant Taliban resistance has shown.

The ISIS push has bitten back, exposing utter confu-

sion from Washington and its threadbare pretence of “freedom and democracy”.

Twisted tangles of hypocrisy could not get much more cynical.

Desperate alliances are even being proposed with Iran, only yesterday allegedly the very “embodiment of evil” and a “terrible threat to the whole world”, to be held under excruciating economic sanctions siege and constantly bullied, pressurised and threatened with war by the West and its regional attack dog Zionists, but now to be suddenly considered for joint military action to attack the insurgents (though it may be number one demon again soon enough).

The British, ever the Washington sidekick, are just as cynically reopening the UK embassy in Tehran after years of interdict (and even admitting to participation in the 1953 CIA Mossad-eq overthrow, and installation of the reactionary Shah, to do so).

Simultaneously while trying to manoeuvre carefully selected Shia stooge prime minister Nouri al-Maliki against the ISIS in northern Iraq using American aid and military, the Obama presidency has been calling for \$500M in direct aid to be injected into Syria, to train more supposedly “moderate” insurgent elements within Syria against the Shia supported Assad regime.

Maliki, put into place at US embassy behest as a re-booted southern Shia version of the thuggish Saddam Hussein, to keep the lid on Iraq after the devastation of the US Iraq invasion and subsequent civil war, and supposedly to be backed by US “military aid” to suppress the uprising, is now twisting and turning even more than Saddam, who turned on his own CIA masters under the growing anti-imperialist Arab street pressures stirring three decades ago and intensified by the then already ripening capitalist crisis.

Maliki’s latest sectarian (Shia) overtures towards Damascus, welcoming recent bombing runs by Syria across the border into Iraq against the ISIS, directly contradict the Washington’s plans to further feed the bogus “uprising” against Damascus that it set going

three years ago and has fanned into civil war against the Assad regime because of its anti-Zionist stance and refusal to fully kow-tow to Western interests.

All these contradictions have left the fake-“lefts” of all shades twisting and turning too, trying to keep up with what the West deems currently to be its “enemy”,

It is now ISIS, and the new upheaval is a stunning further setback facing the imperialist order and its Pentagon “endless war” which has failed completely to re-establish any kind of stable control in the assorted “regime changes” and “rebuilding of democracy” blitzings and occupations.

Even though there is no long term future for a medieval “Caliphate”, as such, in a modern technological and rational world, its declaration and establishment has ripped apart the pretence that Iraq has been successfully pacified and brought back under Western neo-colonising stooge control.

For all the mysticism of the ideology leading the Iraq struggle, it is essentially one of both revolutionary anti-imperialism, against the 2002 US occupation firstly, but also all the way back to rejecting the artificial borders drawn up by the imperialist plundering of the Middle East after the First World War (in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement secret treaty – exposed by the Bolsheviks), and class-war disgust at the bourgeois collaborators in Baghdad who now keep the plunder going, these days as proxies primarily for the post-WW2 victor US imperialism.

It is the class war content of the newly declared “Caliphate” in northern Iraq which is enraging the neocon/Fox News reactionaries in America, and their berserk shrieking to “bomb them all”, and not its demonised religious form.

Equally disconcerting for the imperialist ruling class is the increasing efficiency and military coordination of the revolt, demonstrating a huge step upwards in the capabilities of the ever growing rebellion around the world, and particularly in the Middle East, against the grotesque injustice of Western domination and ex-

ploitation, being multiplied daily by escalating crisis economic collapse.

As the EPSR was warning even at the beginning of the lying Goebbels Iraq war build-up (EPSR 1128 19-10-02):

Western laws, censorship, and fake-‘lefts’ (from the Revisionists and the SLP to the Alliance) are all just missing the point of what is happening in the world with their attempts to ‘condemn’ or arrest any ‘support’ for so-called ‘terrorist’ responses around the world to imperialist domination.

The largely spontaneous acts of revenge on the West everywhere will inevitably INCREASE as the international economic crisis of ‘over-production’ spreads slump and collapse ever-more widely, - no matter how regimented becomes the ideological pressure on petty-bourgeois traditionalist politics to “denounce atrocities”, etc, and no matter how ludicrously draconian becomes surveillance to harass so-called ‘sympathisers’ in every way possible.

On the contrary, as ‘liberal’ critics keep on warning the West from the damp fence on which they sit, this hardline imperialist bullying in all directions is only ever going to add to the quantity of alienation in the world and provoke more bitter hostility to Western domination than even before.

That alienation **has** proliferated massively as desperation (hunger, homelessness, unemployment, fear, and terror) has been piled on top of the endless routine tyrannical exploitation and oppression of monopoly capitalism throughout the Third World by the unrolling slump crisis.

The doubts of the “damp fence-ites” have strengthened too, with loud warnings now from the likes of motor-mouth Russell Brand against the neocons – “the world’s real terrorists” as he correctly says – that “every bomb dropped on ISIS will simply be a seed sprouting 500 more rebels”.

His anti-theory “no leadership” anarchism falls short of any real understanding and still sees the rebels as a “problem”, however.

Some of the “liberal” press accounts go a little further in drawing out how capitalism has created the ISIS effectively, not by CIA subversion but by spontaneous response to war blitzing. This *Guardian* piece reflects the “left” reformist and revisionist CP view though, despite

some good points, it still effectively “condemns” the revolt by describing it in the (edited) first paragraph as the “mutant progeny of the ‘war on terror’” :

Eleven years after the US and Britain launched their onslaught on Iraq as the centre-piece of the terror war, they are once again considering a return to the scene of their strategic humbling, as its gruesome consequences are played out across an already devastated country.

Isis are in reality the shock troops of a wider Sunni Arab revolt – backed by ex-Ba’athists and other former resistance groups – against the Shia-led government of Nouri al-Maliki. Such are the contortions of western policy that, while the US and fellow travellers are effectively allied with Isis and other Sunni Islamist rebels fighting the Assad regime, in Iraq they stand with the Shia Islamist Maliki battling the same groups.

It was his US-trained forces that melted away when Isis took Iraq’s second city, Mosul, last week. The collapse was smoothed by sympathetic or corrupt commanders, as well as tacit deals with Kurdish forces who used the chance to take control of the contested city of Kirkuk and the northern oilfields.

Now Isis is coming up against more serious resistance on the way to Baghdad. The sectarian takfiri group was originally the al-Qaida franchise holder under the US-British occupation, but was rejected by the bulk of the resistance. It then moved into Syria to join the anti-Assad uprising, with tacit backing from Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia.

Since last summer it has controlled a swath of Syrian territory near the Iraqi border, amassing wealth and foreign recruits. But it was the Maliki regime’s brutal suppression of a Sunni protest movement last year – culminating in the massacre of dozens of demonstrators in Hawija – that gave Isis a new opening in Iraq. By January it had taken over Falluja, scene of some of the worst US occupation atrocities, and unleashed carnage on Shia communities across the country.

The idea that this horror story can be disconnected from the US-led military occupation of Iraq that preceded it, as the war’s apologists still try to maintain, is an absurdity. It’s not just that there was no al-Qaida or Isis in the country before the invasion, or that the occupiers

deliberately dismantled the Iraqi state and army and destroyed the country’s infrastructure in the process. It’s that colonial divide-and-rule sectarianism was deliberately fostered from the first day of the occupation.

Not only was a religious and ethnic carve-up enforced across public life, but US commanders were directly involved in sponsoring an El Salvador-style dirty war of sectarian death squads to undermine the armed resistance.

Maliki was himself selected by the US as a suitable strongman to protect its interests. That’s not to suggest that any transition from Saddam’s dictatorship wouldn’t have been painful, or that Iraqis have had no agency in what took place. But much of the western debate of the past week has glossed over the scale of the human and social catastrophe unleashed by the US-led war. The most recent US academic estimate of the death toll is at least half a million, while Iraq Body Count has recorded a minimum of 190,100 violent deaths as a result of the invasion – 4 million became refugees.

That wasn’t a “tragic error”, as some claim, or a problem of post-invasion planning. It was a barbarous crime whose predicted consequences Iraqis are living with today. The idea that Tony Blair – who helped launch the war on a false pretext and now says we need to “liberate ourselves from the notion that ‘we’ have caused this” – remains Middle East peace envoy is beyond parody.

The apologists say US troops left too soon, that Iraq is now a democracy, and that Syria shows non-intervention can carry its own costs. But post-occupation Iraq is an institutionalised kleptocracy, a US-Iranian condominium where voting is by enforced sectarian and ethnic blocs, torture is rampant, and thousands are imprisoned without trial.

If such democracy is the yardstick, it was the Iraqi government that demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops. As for Syria, the US and its allies are bleeding it by funding and arming rebel forces, while withholding the means for a decisive breakthrough. Without doubt, direct western military intervention would escalate the death toll to Iraqi proportions.

The arguments about how Iraq reached today’s breakdown matter precisely because the backlash from the last intervention risks

being used to justify yet another – and not just in Iraq. Since its launch in 2001, the war on terror has spread and spawned support for jihadist terror groups across the Muslim world, from al-Qaida to the Pakistani Taliban. The pattern of blowback couldn't be clearer. US bombing or drone attacks on Isis in Iraq, embedded in urban areas, won't break its grip on cities such as Mosul or Tikrit. But it will certainly kill large numbers of civilians and inflame the country, and the region, still further.

A narrow, violent takfiri group such as Isis is unlikely to be able to hold large urban centres for long – experience suggests its Sunni allies will turn against it – let alone continue its advance into Baghdad or Shia heartlands. But its dramatic successes have certainly put the survival of Iraq itself at stake. Like Syria, the country is already effectively partitioned – and Islamist groups are very far from being alone in rejecting the artificial “Sykes-Picot” borders imposed by Britain and France on the Arab world at the end of the first world war.

Only a determined break by a major Iraqi political force with the sectarian and ethnic politics bequeathed by Bush and Blair could now halt the fragmentation. The entire Arab world is living with the fallout from a century of attempts to control their region and resources. More intervention will only deepen the crisis.

But while this, written before the “caliphate declaration”, usefully explores some of the developments from the Iraq occupation leading to the current upheaval, it is totally contradictory, still declaring the ISIS insurgency which has forced all these issues to the surface, to be a “problem” and effectively condemns it for “narrow violence”.

Such a liberal reformist view this is no different to the *Morning Star*-style CPB revisionist “peaceful progress” step-by-step democratic delusions, originating in Stalin's Third International leadership and his mistaken assessments post-war, declaring that imperialism could no longer expand and had only to be “contained” to stop its warmongering aggressions while socialism steadily overtook it – a complete abandonment of revolutionary understanding.

All objections to the de-moted neocon “they have to bombed into the ground because of their intolerable evil” immediately lose their validity if these fighters are characterised as just “fanatical extremists” so off-the-wall that even the “local Sunni would turn against them” (which has not proved true at all – just the opposite, they have generally supported them).

The conclusion demanding some “determined break” with “sectarian politics” is fanciful nonsense.

What “major Iraqi political force” can there be to do that except more bourgeois rule – unless the working class takes power?

Since there is no revolutionary socialist leadership at present then the only actual events which head that way are those which are **defeating imperialism** and its stooges.

Marxism does not have to **support** any movement as such (implying sharing its ideology and strategy) but neither can it “condemn” the revolts that masses everywhere have turned to, choosing their own ways of fighting, albeit for want of clearer leadership.

As the *EPSR* has explained before, (see *EPSR Perspectives 2002* eg) Lenin's famous article *Guerrilla Warfare* made it clear that it is the place of the revolutionaries to guide and educate the masses in a better way forwards, taking the revolutionary lead for the conscious mass struggle to overthrow capitalism, and it is **their failing** if that does not happen – but it is no part of theirs to stand **against** the spontaneous upheavals and in fact revolutionaries will be in sympathy with their civil war attempts to fight back.

How is any break, “determined” or otherwise, to be achieved after a 10 year long fascist occupation except by an armed revolutionary struggle and most particularly when it is up against the most grotesque suppression, blitzing, torture and fascist violence yet seen on earth, as revelation after revelation has made clear is the reality of the Iraq invasion and occupation?

Barbaric oppression and violence has been taught to, and imposed on Iraq (and

much of the Middle East) throughout the colonialist epoch, including from the early 20th century with the instigation of hostage taking by the imperial powers (and executions) on the relatives of local chieftains to keep them in line; the “punishment” of dissent by blowing up houses; collective punishment killings after rebellious incidents; the first use of aerial gas bombing (by order of Winston Churchill) and other atrocities.

Palestine has been ruthlessly and relentlessly blitzed, shelled, sniped, ethnically cleansed and terrorised by such methods for over 70 years by the land-thieving neo-colonialist Jewish occupation, half the indigenous population (for the last 1500 years) exiled in refugee camps and dispossessed and half the remainder of those still in Palestine held in essentially concentration camp siege conditions in Gaza, or the scraps of the worst land left to them in the West Bank under apartheid conditions worse than that imposed on South Africa's black population.

The benighted and persecuted population is currently under yet another terrorising threat of Nazi-style “collective punishment” (already repeatedly carried out by the Zionists in incident after incident of genocidal murderousness, using the foulest of modern weaponry including bone-burning white phosphorus), this time in “retribution” for the discovery of three shot Zionist teenagers, despite no proof of responsibility, and after suffering non-stop violent intimidation and searches already for three weeks, mass arrests of hundreds by the brutal IDF forces, tearing-up of homes during “searches”, destroying personal property, and the killing five Palestinians already for “objecting” (plus one outright fascist lynch kidnapping and murder of a random Palestinian teenager).

In Iraq itself since the 2002 invasion there has been a stream of degenerate Nazi atrocities, including the infamous prison tortures and humiliations, numerous massacres, beatings and shooting killings of prisoners, as well as the appalling Nazi vengeance destruction of Falluja by the US marines,

wiping out multiple thousands including many civilians and destroying most of the city (and including once again the use of illegal white phosphorus by the US). By 2004 this had already led to a dogged resistance, again as described by the *EPSR* (No 1254 26-10-04):

From the start in Iraq, as capitalist press admissions themselves below agree, the areas of “resistance” to this American domination have been brutally and systematically MASSACRED, — with the Iraqi middle-class stooge “provisional government” (Empire-appointed) tut-tutting and expressing “regret”, etc, (occasionally) about the deaths and destruction continuing, but basically not lifting a finger to do anything about it, (basically pleased that the class “enemy” is being tamed by the Empire where they are not sure they can do it any more).

As already explained in the EPSR, this continues the capitalist-bourgeois state racket of Saddamism (set up by the US imperialists in the first place in the early 1970's as a “bulwark against communism” which Saddam cleverly ran as a “pro-Soviet” and “semi-socialist” state but in reality NEVER getting the capitalist bourgeoisie off the backs of the Iraqi ordinary people and poor, who all suffered intolerably under 13 years sanctions, and who all reacted in civil-war disgust when Saddam's chauvinistic and military bluster finally collapsed ignominiously and in greater torment and suffering than ever for the ordinary Iraqi people in just one week in 1993.

Now, totally confused and leaderless as the ordinary Iraqis are, they are putting up their OWN fight against Western military occupation and permanent rule, and against the stooge Iraq middle-class regime which pretends to be prepared to be an “independent” government again of Iraq one day. (It is a total lie and a nonsense. The only aim is to be part of a vast American Empire of world control.)

Hence some of the nature of the war continuing now, — the deliberate suicide bombings and massacres of all who work for or serve this stooge American-Empire “Iraqi” middle-class regime in some way or other: the recruits get bombed; they get massacred; the dubious Christian churches get bombed; dubious Western “aid agency” people get taken hostage; dodgy “helpers” who in fact are helping build American Empire bases get taken hostage; etc, etc, etc, etc, — often with grisly consequences.

But this is CIVIL WAR, — as best as the ordinary long-suf-

fering Iraqi people can work it out and fight it, still without any real leadership or guidance.

This rebellion, was built on an already devastating 10 year long sanctions siege after the first Gulf War, and then further deliberately stepped up into the foulest of sectarian conflict by conscious American "dirty war" "El Salvador tactics, introduced in 2005-7 to stir up and divide the country with Nazi ferocity, tapping into and fostering already festering ethnic tensions as described in the following bourgeois press pieces (siege first):

...a poll conducted by ComRes last year...asked people in Britain how many Iraqis had been killed as a result of the 2003 invasion. A majority said that fewer than 10,000 had been killed: a figure so shockingly low it was a profanity.

...In fact, academic estimates range from less than half a million to more than a million. John Tirman, the principal research scientist at the MIT Centre for International Studies, has examined all the credible estimates; he told me that an average figure "suggests roughly 700,000". Tirman pointed out that this excluded deaths among the millions of displaced Iraqis, up to 20% of the population.

...There is no question that the epic crime committed in Iraq has burrowed into the public consciousness. Many recall that "shock and awe" was the extension of a murderous blockade imposed for 13 years by Britain and the US and suppressed by much of the mainstream media, including the BBC. Half a million Iraqi infants died as a result of sanctions, according to Unicef. I watched children dying in hospitals, denied basic painkillers.

Ten years later, in New York, I met the senior British official responsible for these "sanctions". He is Carne Ross, once known in the UN as "Mr Iraq". He is now a truth-teller. I read to him a statement he had made to a parliamentary select committee in 2007: "The weight of evidence clearly indicates that sanctions caused massive human suffering among ordinary Iraqis, particularly children. We, the US and UK governments, were the primary engineers and offenders of sanctions and were well aware of the evidence at the time but we largely ignored it and blamed it on the Saddam government ...

effectively denying the entire population the means to live."

I said to him: "That's a shocking admission."

"Yes, I agree," he replied. "I feel ashamed about it ..." He described how the Foreign Office manipulated a willing media. "We would control access to the foreign secretary as a form of reward to journalists. If they were critical, we would not give them the goodies of trips around the world. We would feed them factoids of sanitised intelligence, or we'd freeze them out."

...In the build-up to the 2003 invasion, according to studies by Cardiff University and Media Tenor, the BBC followed the Blair government's line and lies, and restricted airtime to those opposing the invasion.

The truth about the criminal bloodbath in Iraq cannot be "countered" indefinitely. Neither can the truth about our support for the mediavalists in Saudi Arabia, the nuclear-armed predators in Israel, the new military fascists in Egypt and the jihadist "liberators" of Syria, whose propaganda is now BBC news. There will be a reckoning – not just for the Blairs, Straws and Campbells, but for those paid to keep the record straight.

Retired Colonel Jim Steele, whose military decorations include the Silver Star, the Defence Distinguished Service Medal, four Legions of Merit, three Bronze Stars and the Purple Heart, is not at home. Nor is he at his office headquarters in Geneva, where he is listed as the chief executive officer of Buchanan Renewables, an energy company.

For over a year the *Guardian* has been trying to contact Steele, 68, to ask him about his role during the Iraq war as US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld's personal envoy to Iraq's Special Police Commandos: a fearsome paramilitary force that ran a secret network of detention centres across the country – where those suspected of rebelling against the US-led invasion were tortured for information.

On the 10th anniversary of the Iraq invasion the allegations of American links to the units that eventually accelerated Iraq's descent into civil war cast the US occupation in a new and even more controversial light. The investigation was sparked over a year ago by millions of classified US military documents dumped onto the internet and their mysterious references to US soldiers ordered to ignore torture. Private Bradley Manning, 25, is facing a 20-year sentence, accused of leaking military secrets.

Steele's contribution was pivotal. He was the covert US

figure behind the intelligence gathering of the new commando units. The aim: to halt a nascent Sunni insurgency in its tracks by extracting information from detainees.

It was a role made for Steele. The veteran had made his name in El Salvador almost 20 years earlier as head of a US group of special forces advisers who were training and funding the Salvadoran military to fight the FNLM guerrilla insurgency. These government units developed a fearsome international reputation for their death squad activities. Steele's own biography describes his work there as the "training of the best counterinsurgency force" in El Salvador.

Of his El Salvador experience in 1986, Steele told Dr Max Manwaring, the author of *El Salvador at War: An Oral History*: "When I arrived here there was a tendency to focus on technical indicators ... but in an insurgency the focus has to be on human aspects. That means getting people to talk to you."

But the arming of one side of the conflict by the US hastened the country's descent into a civil war in which 75,000 people died and 1 million out of a population of 6 million became refugees.

Celerino Castillo, a Senior Drug Enforcement Administration special agent who worked alongside Steele in El Salvador, says: "I first heard about Colonel James Steele going to Iraq and I said they're going to implement what is known as the Salvadoran Option in Iraq and that's exactly what happened. And I was devastated because I knew the atrocities that were going to occur in Iraq which we knew had occurred in El Salvador."

It was in El Salvador that Steele first came in to close contact with the man who would eventually command US operations in Iraq: David Petraeus. Then a young major, Petraeus visited El Salvador in 1986 and reportedly even stayed with Steele at his house.

But while Petraeus headed for the top, Steele's career hit an unexpected buffer when he was embroiled in the Iran-Contra affair. A helicopter pilot, who also had a licence to fly jets, he ran the airport from where the American advisers illegally ran guns to right-wing Contra guerrillas in Nicaragua. While the congressional inquiry that followed put an end to Steele's military ambitions, it won him the admiration of then congressman Dick Cheney who sat on the committee and admired Steele's efforts fighting leftists in both Nicaragua and El Salvador.

In late 1989 Cheney was in charge of the US invasion of Panama to overthrow their once favoured son, General Manuel Noriega. Cheney picked Steele to take charge of organising a new police force in Panama and be the chief liaison between the new government and the US

military.

Todd Greentree, who worked in the US embassy in El Salvador and knew Steele, was not surprised at the way he resurfaced in other conflict zones. "It's not called 'dirty war' for nothing; so it's no surprise to see individuals who are associated and sort of know the ins-and-outs of that kind of war, reappear at different points in these conflicts," he says.

A generation later, and half the world away, America's war in Iraq was going from bad to worse. It was 2004 – the neo-cons had dismantled the Ba'athist party apparatus, and that had fostered anarchy. A mainly Sunni uprising was gaining ground and causing major problems in Fallujah and Mosul. There was a violent backlash against the US occupation that was claiming over 50 American lives a month by 2004.

The US Army was facing an unconventional, guerrilla insurgency in a country it knew little about. There was already talk in Washington DC of using the Salvadoran option in Iraq and the man who would spearhead that strategy was already in place.

Soon after the invasion in March 2003 Jim Steele was in Baghdad as one of the White House's most important "consultants", sending back reports to Rumsfeld. His memos were so valued that Rumsfeld passed them on to George Bush and Cheney. Rumsfeld spoke of him in glowing terms. "We had discussion with General Petraeus yesterday and I had a briefing today from a man named Steele who's been out there working with the security forces and been doing a wonderful job as a civilian as a matter of fact."

In June 2004 Petraeus arrived in Baghdad with the brief to train a new Iraqi police force with an emphasis on counterinsurgency. Steele and serving US colonel James Coffman introduced Petraeus to a small hardened group of police commandos, many of them among the toughest survivors of the old regime, including General Adnan Thabit, sentenced to death for a failed plot against Saddam but saved by the US invasion. Thabit, selected by the Americans to run the Special Police Commandos, developed a close relationship with the new advisers. "They became my friends. My advisers, James Steele and Colonel Coffman, were all from special forces, so I benefited from their experience ... but the main person I used to contact was David Petraeus."

...Petraeus began pouring money from a multimillion dollar fund into what would become the Special Police Commandos. According to the US Government Accounts Office, they received a share of an \$8.2bn (£5.4bn) fund paid for by the US taxpayer...

With Petraeus's almost unlimited access to money and weapons, and Steele's field expertise in counterinsurgency the stage was set for the com-

mandos to emerge as a terrifying force. One more element would complete the picture. The US had barred members of the violent Shia militias like the Badr Brigade and the Mahdi Army from joining the security forces, but by the summer of 2004 they had lifted the ban.

Shia militia members from all over the country arrived in Baghdad "by the lorry-load" to join the new commandos. These men were eager to fight the Sunnis: many sought revenge for decades of Sunni-supported, brutal Saddam rule, and a chance to hit back at the violent insurgents and the indiscriminate terror of al-Qaida.

Petraeus and Steele would unleash this local force on the Sunni population as well as the insurgents and their supporters and anyone else who was unlucky enough to get in the way. It was classic counterinsurgency. It was also letting a lethal, sectarian genie out of the bottle. The consequences for Iraqi society would be catastrophic. At the height of the civil war two years later 3,000 bodies a month were turning up on the streets of Iraq — many of them innocent civilians of sectarian war.

...Desperate for information, the commandos set up a network of secret detention centres where insurgents could be brought and information extracted from them.

The commandos used the most brutal methods to make detainees talk. There is no evidence that Steele or Coffman took part in these torture sessions, but General Muntadher al Samari, a former general in the Iraqi army, who worked after the invasion with the US to rebuild the police force, claims that they knew exactly what was going on and were supplying the commandos with lists of people they wanted brought in. He says he tried to stop the torture, but failed and fled the country.

"We were having lunch. Col Steele, Col Coffman, and the door opened and Captain Jabr was there torturing a prisoner. He [the victim] was hanging upside down and Steele got up and just closed the door, he didn't say anything — it was just normal for him."

He says there were 13 to 14 secret prisons in Baghdad under the control of the interior ministry and used by the Special Police Commandos. He alleges that Steele and Coffman had access to all these prisons and that he visited one in Baghdad with both men.

"They were secret, never declared. But the American top brass and the Iraqi leadership knew all about these prisons. The things that went on there: drilling, murder, torture. The ugliest sort of torture I've ever seen."

According to one soldier with the 69th Armoured Regiment who was deployed in Samarra in 2005 but who doesn't want to be identified: "It was like the Nazis ... like the Gestapo basically. They [the commandos] would essentially torture anybody that they had good reason to suspect, knew something, or was part of the insurgency ... or supporting it, and people knew about that."

The *Guardian* interviewed six torture victims as part of this investigation. One, a man who says he was held for 20 days, said: "There was no sleep. From the sunset, the torture would start on me and on the other prisoners."

"They wanted confessions. They'd say: 'Confess to what have you done.' When you say: 'I have done nothing. Shall I confess about something I have not done?', they said: 'Yes, this is our way. The Americans told us to bring as many detainees as possible in order to keep them frightened.'

"I did not confess about anything, although I was tor-

tured and [they] took off my toenails."

Neil Smith, a 20-year-old medic who was based in Samarra, remembers what low ranking US soldiers in the canteen said. "What was pretty widely known in our battalion, definitely in our platoon, was that they were pretty violent with their interrogations. That they would beat people, shock them with electrical shock, stab them, I don't know what else ... it sounds like pretty awful things. If you sent a guy there he was going to get tortured and perhaps raped or whatever, humiliated and brutalised by the special commandos in order for them to get whatever information they wanted."

He now lives in Detroit and is a born-again Christian. He spoke to the *Guardian* because he said he now considered it his religious duty to speak out about what he saw. "I don't think folks back home in America had any idea what American soldiers were involved in over there, the torture and all kinds of stuff."

Through *Facebook*, *Twitter* and social media the *Guardian* managed to make contact with three soldiers who confirmed they were handing over detainees to be tortured by the special commandos, but none except Smith were prepared to go on camera.

"If somebody gets arrested and we hand them over to Mol they're going to get their balls hooked, electrocuted or they're going to get beaten or raped up the ass with a coke bottle or something like that," one said.

He left the army in September 2006. Now 28, he works with refugees from the Arab world in Detroit teaching recent arrivals, including Iraqis, English.

"I suppose it is my way of saying sorry," he said.

When the *Guardian/BBC Arabic* posed questions to Petraeus about torture and

his relationship with Steele it received in reply a statement from an official close to the general saying, "General (Ret) Petraeus's record, which includes instructions to his own soldiers ... reflects his clear opposition to any form of torture."

"Colonel (Ret) Steele was one of thousands of advisers to Iraqi units, working in the area of the Iraqi police. There was no set frequency for Colonel Steele's meetings with General Petraeus, although General Petraeus did see him on a number of occasions during the establishment and initial deployments of the special police, in which Colonel Steele played a significant role."

But Peter Maass, then reporting for the *New York Times*, and who has interviewed both men, remembers the relationship differently: "I talked to both of them about each other and it was very clear that they were very close to each other in terms of their command relationship and also in terms of their ideas and ideology of what needed to be done. Everybody knew that he was Petraeus's man. Even Steele defined himself as Petraeus's man."

Maass and photographer Gilles Peress gained a unique audience with Steele at a library-turned-detention-centre in Samarra. "What I heard is prisoners screaming all night long," Peress said. "You know at which point you had a young US captain telling his soldiers, don't, just don't come near this."

Two men from Samarra who were imprisoned at the library spoke to the *Guardian* investigation team. "We'd be tied to a spit or we'd be hung from the ceiling by our hands and our shoulders would be dislocated," one told us. The second said: "They electrocuted me. They hung me up from the ceiling. They were pulling at my ears with pliers, stamping on my head, asking me about my wife, saying they

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Leaving the world to be run by the greed of the capitalist monopolies can never stop resulting in periodic crises where trade-war destruction must rule, and to which the only antidote is Revolution and a strong workers state, --- as these essentials of Marxist-Leninist science explain.

Only the crisis events of collapsing imperialist rule interpreted in this Marxist-Leninist light will educate a mass workers party of leadership to do the necessary tasks.

The Revisionist retreat from the Soviet workers state because of crawling to shallow Western glitz and shame at their own past bureaucratic mistakes has only proved the soundness of Lenin's 'State & Revolution' science about a very long period of proletarian dictatorship being the only way for the world to see-off monopoly imperialist warmongering, now back with a vengeance.

It is often said and written that the main point in Marx's teachings is the class struggle; but this is not true. And from this untruth very often springs the opportunist distortion of Marxism, its falsification in such a way as to make it acceptable to the bourgeoisie. For the doctrine of the class struggle was created not by Marx, but by the bourgeoisie before Marx, and generally speaking it is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Those who recognise only the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the boundaries of bourgeois thinking and bourgeois politics. To confine Marxism to the doctrine of the class struggle means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what constitutes the most profound difference between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well as big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which the real understanding and recognition of Marxism is to be tested. And it is not surprising that when the history of Europe brought the working class face to face with this question as a practical issue, not only all the opportunists and reformists, but all the "Kautskyites" (people who vacillate between reformism and Marxism) proved to be miserable philistines and petty-bourgeois democrats who repudiate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

"The last cause of all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as compared to the tendency of capitalist production to develop the productive forces as if only the absolute power of consumption of the entire society would be their limit." (Capital, Vol III, P568.)

"For many a decade past", wrote Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, "the

history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly. In these crises a great part, not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity - the epidemic of overproduction. Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed. And why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary...they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them."

The conditions of bourgeois democracy very often compel us to take a certain stand on a multitude of small and petty reforms, but we must be able, or learn, to take such a position on these reforms. (in such a manner) that - to oversimplify the matter for the sake of clarity - five minutes of every half-hour speech are devoted to reforms and twenty-five minutes to the coming revolution. (Lenin Dec 1916: Principles involved in the war issue.)

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would bring her here.”

According to Maass in an interview for the investigation: “The interrogation centre was the only place in the mini green zone in Samarra that I was not allowed to visit. However, one day, Jim Steele said to me, ‘hey, they’ve just captured a Saudi jihadi. Would you like to interview him?’

“I’m taken not into the main area, the kind of main hall – although out the corner of my eye I can see that there were a lot of prisoners in there with their hands tied behind their backs – I was taken to a side office where the Saudi was brought in, and there was actually blood dripping down the side of this desk in the office.

Peress picks up the story: “We were in a room in the library interviewing Steele and I look around and I see blood everywhere, you know. He (Steele) hears the scream from the other guy who’s being tortured as we speak, there’s the blood stains in the corner of the desk in front of him.”

Maass says: “And while this interview was going on with this Saudi with Jim Steele also in the room, there were these terrible screams, somebody shouting Allah Allah Allah. But it wasn’t kind of religious ecstasy or something like that, these were screams of pain and terror.”

One of the torture survivors remembers how Adnan Thabit “came into the library and he told Captain Dorade and Captain Ali, go easy on the prisoners. Don’t dislocate their shoulders. This was because people were having to undergo surgery when they were released from the library.”

General Muntadher fled after two close colleagues were killed after they were summoned to the ministry, their bodies found on a rubbish tip. He got out of Iraq and went to Jordan. In less than a month, he says, Steele contacted him. Steele was anxious to meet and suggested he come to the luxury Sheraton hotel in Amman where Steele was staying. They met in the lobby at 8pm and Steele kept him talking for nearly two hours.

“He was asking me about the prisons. I was surprised by the questions and I reminded him that these were the same prisons where we both used to work. I reminded him of the incident where he had opened the door and Colonel Jabr was torturing one of the prisoners and how he didn’t do anything. Steele said: ‘But I remember that I told the officer off’. So I said to him: ‘No, you didn’t – you didn’t tell the officer off. You didn’t even tell General Adnan Thabit that this officer was committing human rights abuses against these prisoners’. And he was silent. He didn’t comment or answer. I was surprised by this.”

According to General Muntadher: “He wanted to

know specifically: did I have any information about him, James Steele? Did I have evidence against him? Photographs, documents: things which proved he committed things in Iraq; things he was worried I might reveal. This was the purpose of his visit.

“I am prepared to go to the international court and stand in front of them and swear that high-ranking officials such as James Steele witnessed crimes against human rights in Iraq. They didn’t stop it happening and they didn’t punish the perpetrators.”

Steele, the man, remains an enigma. He left Iraq in September 2005 and has since pursued energy interests, joining the group of companies of Texas oilman Robert Mosebacher. Until now he has stayed where he likes to be – far from the media spotlight.

This horrific civil war, it has now become clear, was waged essentially as a class war, carried mainly (but not exclusively) against the Sunni sections of the population. The divide-and-rule Western occupation deliberately inflamed sectarian hatreds that had already been fostered under Saddam Hussein to create death squad terror (though the US also developed a Sunni collaboration of paid patrols to suppress the struggle as well).

As another recent bourgeois press piece made clear, this sectarianism hardly existed before Saddam was used to overturn the post-war pro-Soviet revolution which deposed the old British colluding monarchy of the 1950s:

Neither side, though, has yet produced historical evidence of significant communal fighting between Iraq’s religions, sects, ethnicities or nationalities. Prior to the 2003 US-led occupation, the only incident was the 1941 violent looting of Jewish neighbourhoods – which is still shrouded in mystery as to who planned it. Documents relating to that criminal incident are still kept secret at the Public Records Office by orders of successive British governments. The bombing of synagogues in Baghdad in 1950-51 turned out to be the work of Zionists to frighten Iraq’s Jews – one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world – into emigrating to Israel following their refusal to do so.

Until the 1970s nearly all Iraq’s political organisations were secular, attracting people from all religions and none. The dividing

lines were sharply political, mostly based on social class and political orientation. The growth of religious parties followed Saddam’s ruthless elimination of all political entities other than the Ba’ath party. Places of worship became centres of political agitation and organisation.

Despite popular myths, the majority of Ba’ath party founders were Shia. However, Iraqi Ba’athist ideology always had a racist dimension against the Kurdish people and non-Arabs – as well as a class orientation, when in power, that marginalised millions in the poorest sections of society, mostly in the south. Southern Iraq and some areas of Baghdad, populated by mostly Shia migrants from southern rural areas, have historically been home to the poorest people.

Iraq’s biggest mass organisation from the 1940s to the 60s was the Iraqi Communist party, founded in 1934 by activists from all religious and ethnic backgrounds. It was the strongest party even in Iraqi Kurdistan, and remained a mass party until its leadership decided to join Saddam’s regime in 1973 – against the wishes of most party members. Saddam launched a vicious campaign against the ICP in 1978-9, and the party lost its *raison d’être* after joining the Iraq Governing Council set up after the occupation in 2003.

Commentators on Iraq often refer to ethnic wars waged against its Kurdish people. They fail to mention that none of these wars were popular but were ruthlessly pursued by repressive regimes, particularly Saddam’s.

One of the greatest testaments to the tolerance that exists between the various communities in Iraq is that Baghdad still has up to a million Kurds, who have never experienced communal violence by Arabs. Similarly, about 20% of Basra’s population is Sunni. Samarra, a mostly Sunni city, is home to two of the most sacred Shia shrines. Its Sunni clergy have been the custodians of the shrines for centuries.

Every tribe in Iraq has Sunnis and Shia in its ranks. Every town and city has a mix of communities. My experience of Iraq, and that of all friends and relatives, is that of an amazing mix of coexisting communities, despite successive divide-and-rule regimes.

The most serious sectarian and ethnic tensions in Iraq’s modern history followed the 2003 US-led occupation, which faced massive

popular opposition and resistance. The US had its own divide-and-rule policy, promoting Iraqi organisations founded on religion, ethnicity, nationality or sect rather than politics. Many senior officers in the newly formed Iraqi army came from these organisations and Saddam’s army. This was exacerbated three years ago, when sectarian groups in Syria were backed by the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

It is this officer class that this month abandoned Mosul and a third of Iraq’s territory to the terrorists of Isis, beefed up by thousands of foreign fighters, members of Saddam’s Ba’ath party, and the Islamic party (a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood). It has also become clear that leaders of the Kurdistan regional government have expanded their control and implemented a *de facto* ceasefire with the sectarian insurgents. It is also significant that the officers who abandoned Mosul and other areas without firing a bullet fled to Kurdistan.

Whether Iraq can survive this most serious threat to its existence remains to be seen. But those who claim it could only have peace if it is divided into three states do not appreciate the makeup of Iraqi society – the three regions would quickly fall under the rule of violent sectarians and chauvinists. Given how ethnically and religiously mixed Iraq’s regions are, particularly in Baghdad and central Iraq, a three-way national breakup would be a recipe for permanent wars in which only the oil companies, the arms suppliers, and the warlords will be the winners.

Balkanising Iraq may indeed be a fallback solution for imperialism to keep some control as they have done in the Balkans themselves to break up once revisionist Yugoslavia, or simply to foster the war and chaos atmosphere, which is the continuing main aim of capitalism, whose central strategy is still to drag the entire world into war.

(Far from the Middle East destruction being simply a “war for oil” as the shallow fake-“left” theories declare, it is much more part of Washington strategic domination and intimidation plans, which may well involve **destruction** of oil and other resources too as part of the overall destruction of “surplus capital” which the crisis demands if capitalism

is to survive.)

Agreed, the reactionary Zionist's are now supporting the notion by backing the Kurdish independence demands.

But it has not been Washington's strategy to date, which instead has tried to find a dictatorial strongman as a substitute Saddam, to keep Iraq centralised (and to allow the exploitation and plundering of the economy by Western corporations more surely than a fragmented region will allow).

Washington thought it had this established with the corrupt Nouri al-Maliki, enough to pull out their troops in a pretended "solution" by the "liberal" Obama presidency (in reality just as fascist as the Bushites) to satisfy growing war-weary domestic hostility to the White House "democracy" fraud.

The forced choice of Maliki replaced the initial CIA stooge prime minister, the Sunni Ayad Allawi who could not hold things together against the Shia mass revolts of the Mahdi army, forcing the US to find a Shia alternative.

But Maliki's bribery and favouritism has turned out like a more corrupt and degenerate version of Saddam Hussein to serve US capitalist interests. But this was already proving an explosive disaster months ago as this bourgeois press report declared in March:

If there is not quite the same fear as under Saddam, it often feels as if this is only because the security forces are less efficient, not because they are any less cruel or corrupt. The rule of Nouri al-Maliki, Prime Minister since 2006, has become a near dictatorship with highly developed means of repression, such as secret prisons, and pervasive use of torture. He has sought to monopolise control over the army, intelligence service, government apparatus and budget, making sure that his supporters get the lion's share of jobs and contracts. His State of Law Coalition won only 24 per cent of the votes in the 2010 election – 2.8 million votes out of 19 million registered voters – but he has ruled as if he had received an overwhelming mandate.

Dr Mahmoud Othman, a veteran Kurdish leader and member of parliament, gives an excoriating analysis of what is wrong with present-day Iraq. "It is a failed state," he says. "The country is run by gangs [within the government] and gangs are more important than

law. Maliki rules because he is head of the armed forces. Iraq is run by force, but force does not mean that those exercising it are in control."

Saddam Hussein and the US both found to their cost that Iraq can never be ruled by compulsion alone, something Mr Maliki has been slow to learn. The power of religious and ethnic communities is too great for successful coercion by the state and is underpinned by Iraqis' loyalty to tribes, clans and extended families. When the Americans were leaving Iraq their main concern was that they would leave behind a security vacuum. But this was to mistake the nature of Iraqi politics. "The new [post-Saddam Hussein] Iraq has been built on the consensus of three communities: the Kurds, the Shia and the Sunni," says one Iraqi leader, previously optimistic about the future of the country. "This political consensus has fractured." He believes there is still some chance of repairing the damage, but, if this fails, he says "the end of Iraq and the division of the country will be inevitable".

Iraqis who fought for years against Saddam Hussein, blaming most of Iraq's ills on his regime, today express bitter disillusionment with his successors. Mustafa al-Khadimi, a veteran opponent of Saddam's rule, says "I feel saddened and disappointed. I have given my life to destroying the old system and have seen members of my family and friends killed. Now I watch Iraq treated like a cake to be cut up between our politicians." Others, equally despairing, criticise Mr Maliki for exacerbating and exploiting political divisions to keep power in his hands. As the pre-eminent leader of the Shia, three-fifths of the population, he alarms them by suggesting that their political dominance is under threat from the Sunni, a fifth of Iraqis, once in charge under Saddam but now marginalised. Last year, Mr Maliki sought to unite Sunni and Shia Arabs against the Kurds, another fifth of the population, by massing troops and threatening to invade Kurdish-controlled but disputed areas.

What makes these escalating conflicts so bizarre and damaging to Iraq is that they are fought by combatants who are part of the same power-sharing government. But because they don't co-operate – and indeed hate and fear each other – government itself is paralysed. The administrative apparatus has in any case been degraded by departure of able officials abroad and the allocation of jobs solely through political patronage rather than experience or ability, membership of al-Dawa, the ruling Shia religious party often being the essential qualification. One study of Iraqi officials revealed that on average they put in just 17 minutes' productive work during the average day. These toxic elements combine to produce a corrupt,

self-serving and ineffective government. But its failings have been there a long time and might not in themselves have produced a new crisis. Party patronage may be a crude and unfair way of distributing oil wealth, but it benefits a lot of people. Iraqis may be enraged by the lack of public services such as electricity or health care, but they have suffered these shortages for a long time. By 2011 Iraq had achieved a bloody and unsatisfactory stability that might have endured longer had it not been rocked by important changes in the political balance of power inside and outside Iraq.

The last American troops left at the end of 2011 and President Barack Obama made clear by his actions that he did not intend to be inveigled back into the Iraqi political morass. Polls showed American voters had a deep distaste for any involvement in Iraq. American influence plummeted. But the Iraqi political system was in large part a US creation and many of its leaders owed their careers to US backing. This includes Mr Maliki who was appointed as Prime Minister by the US ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, because he was one of the few Shia politicians acceptable to the US and Iran.

Both countries, though they fight each other for influence in Iraq, have a common interest in stabilising the post-Saddam settlement. When Maliki was reappointed Prime Minister in 2010 an Iraqi official called me to comment sarcastically that "the Great Satan (US) and The Axis of Evil (Iran) have come together and given us a new prime minister". With the US departure there disappeared a major force for persuading Iraqi leaders to agree to share power.

In their last years there, the Americans had learned how to play Iraqi political games effectively. In 2007 during the so-called Surge they had offered protection to the Sunni in return for an end to military action against US troops (al-Qa'ida continued to attack the Shia civilians and Iraqi government forces). It was always a temporary arrangement, regarded with suspicion by the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad. Just as the last US soldiers were leaving Iraq, Mr Maliki forced his Sunni Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi to flee to Kurdistan and he was later sentenced to death.

The Sunni had suffered shattering defeats with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the formation of a Shia-Kurdish government and loss of the sectarian civil war. But the conflict in Syria marked a change for the better in Sunni fortunes. They have been emboldened by the bid for power of Syria's Sunni majority just across the border from their own heartlands in Anbar and Nineveh provinces. They are encouraged by Sunni states like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, backing Sunni rebels

in Syria and sympathising with Sunni demonstrators in Iraq. Since late December Iraqi Sunni have peacefully protested against discrimination in all its forms. Maliki and his senior officials appear to be finally taking on board the significance of Sunni protests and the strength of the Sunni counter-offensive against the Shia in the Middle East. Mr Maliki predicted last week that "if the opposition [in Syria] is victorious, there will be civil war in Lebanon, divisions in Jordan and a sectarian war in Iraq".

The US departure, the Syrian crisis and the Sunni protests are all destabilising Iraq. The Kurds and the Shia religious leadership – the Marji'iyah – regard Mr Maliki and his government with distrust, but the very divisions of Iraq that weaken central governments also make it difficult to get rid of those in power, because their opponents are themselves so divided. Opposed to Mr Maliki they may be, but they cannot agree on a successor.

The Shia are themselves divided. Muqtada al-Sadr, the populist nationalist cleric who fought the US occupation, has called for the removal of Maliki and has praised the demonstrators in Anbar. This is important because his well-organised political movement used to have a military wing, the Mehdi Army, feared and execrated by Sunni for carrying out atrocities against them. Muqtada recently said: "Maliki's entire policy is offensive to the Shia because it portrays them as a tyrannous majority in the eyes of the Kurds and Sunni."

These anti-Maliki Shia proletarian-based elements have now been calling for moves to unify with the Sunni areas in Iraq, reflecting the impact of the defeat inflicted by ISIS.

But allying with US imperialism to bomb or fight the Sunni will not solve the issue, nor will establishing some other bourgeois stooge leader.

Neither Shia nor Sunni sectarianism can solve things as they are.

But they are the form the revolutionary struggle has taken at present and what the ISIS has done by its revolutionary upheaval is to drive huge questions to the surface which have to be worked through.

The only real basis of unity is a class basis recognising the socialist revolutionary challenge facing workers in Iraq but also throughout the world to end capitalism.

Condemning these revolts simply plays into capitalism's hands. Raising consciousness to the level of Marxist Leninist revolution-