

A Fig Leaf to Cover Occupation

By Phyllis Bennis | October 16, 2003

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The U.S.-driven UN resolution passed by the Security Council provides only an internationalist fig-leaf for Washington's occupation; the occupation remains illegal and in violation of the UN Charter. The new resolution does nothing to change the fundamental problems of the U.S. occupation of Iraq—its illegitimacy, its unilateralism, and its responsibility for so much destruction in Iraq and for the on-going crisis of violence in the country.

The resolution calls only for a new deadline for the U.S.-selected Iraqi Governing Council to announce its timeline for drafting a constitution and holding elections; it does not set a timeframe for turning Iraqi sovereignty back to Iraq. It does not foresee any central or even significant role for the United Nations. The Council's initial opposition, led by France, Germany, and Russia, largely collapsed in the face of relentless U.S. pressure. But the U.S. "victory" is a pyrrhic one. The new resolution may provide enough cosmetic cover for governments such as Turkey, eager to prove loyalty to Washington, but it will almost certainly not result in other countries sending significant new troop deployments or funds to bolster Washington's occupation.

As long as the U.S. occupation continues, the death of young American soldiers, as well as the death of countless Iraqi civilians, international aid workers, and others, will inevitably continue. The only way to stop the violent attacks on Americans is to end the American occupation; the best way to protect the troops is to bring them home. The Bush administration should completely end its occupation. Because the invasion and occupation destroyed virtually the entire infrastructure of governance and state authority in Iraq, the U.S. should transfer on-the-ground responsibility to a temporary United Nations authority mandated to oversee a rapid return to Iraqi sovereignty.

The U.S. will certainly use the resolution to claim that the war and its occupation of Iraq were sanctioned by the United Nations. The perception that

the UN agreed with the U.S. occupation will of course weaken the UN. Many will not recognize the intensity of U.S. pressure and threats that forced the decision, and the position will increase hostility to the global organization in Iraq and elsewhere, making it difficult later (when the U.S. occupation is acknowledged a failure) for the UN to work in Iraq. Further, the Council decision was a slap to Secretary General Kofi Annan, who had, in the wake of the horrific bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad, shown more willingness to challenge Washington.

The U.S. should publicly acknowledge its obligations, under international law and the Geneva Conventions, to fund the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. It should turn over to an Iraqi-run and internationally supervised development fund, the billions of dollars Washington now owes for the actual rehabilitation of Iraq.

The UN General Assembly, as well as individual governments and groups of governments, should be pressured to take up the Iraq question, removing it from the sole control of the Security Council. The Assembly should be urged to condemn pre-emptive war and to call for an immediate end to the U.S.-UK occupation.

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