

(*Telegraph*, 11 Nov., p. 12) Same warnings from US intelligence: ‘the insurgency is costing the occupation support among Iraqis, according to a CIA report leaked last week to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and endorsed by Bremer.’ (*Newsweek*, 24 Nov., p. 25)

‘There’s no mystery behind the Bushies’ new eagerness to hand things over to the Iraqis... More Americans are dying. Iraqi support for the occupation is plummeting... Attacks have jumped from fewer than 10 a day in May to about 30 to 35 a day. Worse, they have gotten more deadly and sophisticated...’ (*Newsweek*, 24 Nov., p. 24)

Earth to GWB: ‘do something radical, or face an eruption from the Shia majority, a major escalation of the insurgency (and the crumbling of your hopes for re-election).’

The US was determined to avoid free elections in the next year – because the ‘wrong people’ (people who might not take orders) would win. The US also refused to transfer sovereignty immediately to the Governing Council, as Iraqi political parties of all colours were demanding. The solution: delay and deception.

‘Our presence here **will** change from an occupation to an invited presence,’ Paul Bremer. (*FT*, 17 Nov., p. 1, emphasis added) **The new government will have no choice.** ‘Senior British officials said a handover of power depended on the interim government inviting America to continue leading a multi-national force in Iraq. This would probably require a further Security Council resolution.’ (*Telegraph*, 26 Nov., p. 18)

THE GAMBLE

A senior US official said of the new plan, ‘It’s a gamble, a huge gamble. But **it’s easy to overestimate the degree of control over events we have now and to underestimate how much we will retain.**’ Another senior official said that even after 1 July, ‘**We’ll have more levers than you think, and maybe more than the Iraqis think.**’ (‘America’s Gamble: A Quick Exit Plan for Iraq’, *New York Times*, 16 Nov.)

Among the levers: the US military presence itself; the \$20bn US reconstruction budget; and the requirements of US investors. Means of undermining sovereignty, and ensuring US dominance in the new era.

For more background, see [Regime Unchanged](#) by Milan Rai (Pluto, Sept. 2003)

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THE SOVEREIGNTY SHELL GAME

**US Pretends To ‘Hand Over Power’ To The Iraqis
JNV Anti-War Briefing 51 (3 December 2003)**

ENDING THE OCCUPATION?

On 16 Nov., the *Washington Post* hailed ‘a radical new plan for [Iraq’s] political transition that would end the U.S.-led occupation by July 1 and could facilitate a significant withdrawal of U.S. troops next year’.

In a ‘major revision’ of US policy, ‘the new plan authorizes the creation of a provisional national assembly that would assume sovereignty and serve as Iraq’s interim government until a constitution is written and elections are held’. Previously, the US had demanded that a constitution be drafted and elections held **before** a transfer of power, ‘a process that could have stretched into 2005’. (‘Plan to End Occupation Could Trim U.S. Force’, *WP*, 16 Nov.)

But ‘sovereignty’ is not being transferred. The ‘radical new plan’ is merely a change in the method of US domination.

‘SELECTION’ NOT ‘ELECTION’

There is to be a three stage process: **by 29 Feb. 2004**, the Governing Council is to approve a new ‘fundamental law’ to rule during the period of the transitional government. **By 31 May**, a provisional legislative assembly is to be selected by regional “caucus” meetings. **By 30 June**, a provisional Iraqi government is to be elected from this assembly so that on 1 July, the US-UK occupation is to formally come to an end, and ‘sovereignty’ is to transfer to the new provisional government.

(*There are two further stages being floated by the US by 30 Mar. 2005, elections for a constitutional convention, to be followed by a referendum on the new constitution; and by 31 Dec. 2005, elections for a new Iraqi government.*)

So there are to be **indirect** elections from the provincial caucuses to the assembly, and then from the assembly to the government.

The most troubling aspect, however, is the first stage: the construction of the provincial caucuses. ‘The new arrangements are an awkward compromise for the coalition. **The “caucus” process to select the**

provisional legislature will be far from democratic, and could undermine the legitimacy of the interim government.’ (Anton La Guardia, Diplomatic Correspondent, *Telegraph*, 26 Nov., p. 18)

‘As the law is being drafted, the council will set up 15-person committees in each province that will be responsible for **selecting** participants for the caucuses where members of the transitional assembly will be chosen... In an attempt to ensure the process does not get hijacked by religious extremists or former Baathists, participants in the meetings will be restricted to political, religious, tribal, academic and labor union leaders, as well as other influential figures, who have been **vetted by the selection committees.**’ (‘Plan to End Occupation’, *Washington Post*, 16 Nov.)

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF ‘DEMOCRACY’

Then ‘Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highest-ranking religious figure among Iraq’s Shia, objected to the mechanism foreseen by the coalition to choose the transitional assembly, a **“selected election”** by pro-coalition notables. Mr Sistani told Governing Council members the assembly should be elected.’ (*FT*, 1 Dec., p. 8)

‘Qutab Talabani, son of Jalal Talabani, the current head of the council who met Mr Sistani [told the *FT*] the “mechanism” for choosing the transitional assembly had been contested by Mr Sistani, whose support is crucial... **Mr Sistani wants some form of direct election for the assembly** and has questioned in particular the role of the provincial councils in nominating caucus members.

‘Mr. Talabani said other Iraqi leaders also had misgivings about the councils formed in Iraq’s 18 provinces. He cited one example where **a tribal council head had included more than 20 members of his own family in the council.**’ (*FT*, 29 Nov., p. 9)

This is one of the building blocks of the new Iraqi ‘democracy’ that the US and UK have been building.

A FIERCE BUT HIDDEN CONTEST

A struggle is raging in Iraq as to whether the provincial caucuses will be selected by the US or elected by the Iraqi people. ‘The coalition and Iraqi officials insist that some creative way will be found to appease Mr Sistani without holding an election, and a committee is now looking at options.

‘One Shia council member says the grand ayatollah “is a very reasonable guy so if you can show him that this is a way forward with people’s participation I’m sure he’ll buy it.”

But the *FT* warns that ‘the assumption that Mr Sistani will sign off on a compromise was the attitude adopted by the [US-appointed governing] council in the summer, when a committee to study the constitution was set up. Several weeks of discussions produced only deadlock and, as Mr Sistani held firm on his demands, the stalemate eventually provoked an overhaul of the whole transition strategy.’ (*FT*, 3 Dec., p. 13) A warning sign: confrontation may be approaching.

THE US U-TURN

Why did this plan suddenly appear, upsetting the previous US timetable? ‘About 10 days ago [5 Nov.], leaders of the Governing Council [cohered around the Sistani position and] insisted to Bremer that the only popularly acceptable way to draft a constitution would be to hold an election to select the authors.’ The US was horrified. The Council wouldn’t budge. ‘They reached an impasse,’ a US official said. (‘Plan to End Occupation’, *Washington Post*, 16 Nov.)

The news out of Iraq was also serious. US Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez spoke of a ‘turning point’ in the conflict. ‘Dispensing with euphemisms favored by many Bush administration officials in recent months, General Sanchez, commander of the 130,000 American troops in Iraq, described what they were facing as a war... Aides to General Sanchez said the choice of the word “war” was part of a conscious effort by senior military officers to inject realism into debates in Washington.’ (*New York Times*, 12 Nov., p. A8)

Furthermore, Britain was ‘pressing the United States to hand over power to an Iraqi government within a year or risk a full-scale uprising against the military occupation... They say the transfer of power must be speeded up even if it means tearing up America’s step-by-step plan for a return to Iraqi sovereignty.’ ‘Their view has support from elements of the US administration and is thought to have the backing of Paul Bremer, Washington’s pro-consul in Iraq. The issue is certain to be close to the top of the agenda at next week’s state visit by President George W Bush to London... British officials are convinced that they will enjoy only a short period of tolerance from mainstream Iraqis, who may be grateful for the removal of Saddam Hussein, but have no desire to live under foreign rule.’