Foreword

Millions of people across the world have demonstrated against the US/UK occupation of Iraq. In Ireland a clear majority oppose the war and the Irish government’s complicity in it through the use of Shannon Airport for US troop movements and CIA sponsored torture flights.

This FactFile has been produced by the Irish Anti War Movement (IAWM) to counter the biased reporting and pro-war spin from the mainstream media. It aims to assist anti-war activists and supporters with information and analysis.

The IAWM welcomes the participation of all who want to end this bloody war and occupation. Please see our contact details on page 8.

Iraq – the lies continue

by Richard Boyd Barrett & Kevin Wingfield

Everyone now knows that the US led invasion and occupation of Iraq was based on a staggering lie that claimed the regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and so posed an imminent threat to neighbouring countries and to the world. We in the anti-war movement in Ireland, and the world over, and such prominent establishment figures as Scott Ritter, the former chief UN weapons Inspector in Iraq, said at the time that there were no weapons of mass destruction.

George Bush and other key figures in his administration also deliberately lied to the world by suggesting again and again that Saddam’s regime had links with Al Qaeda and was therefore, in some way, connected to the atrocities in the US on September 11 2001. Again, this lie has now been comprehensively rejected even by the US Congress. Al Qaeda had no base inside Iraq before 2003 although it does now as a result of the US led invasion.

These facts are well known. Most people accept that Bush and his cronies lied to justify a war they wanted for other reasons. Most people also accept that the promise that the US would bring democracy and liberation to the Iraqi people has failed dramatically, if they ever believed in the first place, that democratisation and liberation were the objectives of the war.

There is still confusion though

Despite this knowledge, however, and deep suspicion of almost any statement by the Bush administration on Iraq, there is widespread confusion on what to do now. Since the occupation of Iraq began, the anti-war movement has called for the withdrawal of the occupying forces as the only way to bring peace and self-determination to the Iraqi people. Unfortunately, continued lies from the Bush and Blair administrations about the situation in Iraq has led many even of those that opposed to the war to believe that the occupation may be a necessary evil.

Continued on p.2
The new US propaganda that is used to justify the continuing occupation is, in fact, as big a lie as that about WMD. It revolves crucially around the notion that if the US and its allies pull out of Iraq, there will be a sectarian bloodbath and terrible civil war involving Sunni extremists, ex-Ba’athists and Shia fundamentalists backed by Iran. According to the new lie, it is these groups that are responsible for the continuing and terrible violence in Iraq, while US and British forces are “piggies in the middle” trying to help the majority of Iraqis reconstruct their society and establish democracy. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A number of myths

A. The first myth in this complex new web of lies is that resistance in mostly Sunni areas to the US occupation and so-called Iraqi government results from a desperate attempt by Sunni Muslims to retain the privileges they supposedly enjoyed under Saddam Hussein’s regime.

In fact, the majority of Sunnis experienced the same oppression and tyranny under Saddam experienced by all other Iraqis. Saddam happened to be a Sunni but his regime was not a Sunni regime. It was a self-professed secular and nationalist regime that viewed political Islam with great hostility. Saddam’s cabinet included people from Sunni, Shia, Christian and Kurdish backgrounds. Its organising principle was based on demanding absolute loyalty to the Ba’ath party and to Saddam personally and it enforced this principle with ruthless brutality on any and all religious and ethnic groups in Iraq. Certainly, the Kurds in the north and Shia in the South suffered oppression and murder at Saddam’s hands when they challenged his authority but so did any Sunni that attempted the same.

Mostly Sunni Fallujah, for example, which has become a centre of resistance to the US occupation, suffered brutal punishment at the hands of Saddam when its imams refused to add Saddam’s name to the list of prophets called out from the city’s mosques at Friday prayers.

Fallujah became a centre of resistance to the occupation because of the brutal-ity of US occupation – shooting of unarmed protesters demanding the withdrawal of US troops from a school in April 2003.

Human Rights Watch issued a report demolishing the US version that their troops were responding to shooting by protesters (http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/iraqfalluja/).

A few days later a peaceful protest against these killings was itself fired upon by US troops, causing deaths and injuries among protesting civilians (http://www.iraq.be/ned/nieuws/Fallujah.htm).

From this point on, political opposition to the US occupation by many in Fallujah turned into armed resistance.

B. A second myth fostered by the US government and its allies is that the backbone of the insurgency is carried on by foreign Al Qaeda fighters. This is intended to destroy the legitimacy of the resistance in the eyes of Iraqis and the world. But the myth of a foreign-led insurgency by jihadists does not accord with facts on the ground.

The number of foreign insurgents in Iraq is small in number. According to the Brookings Institute, their number varies between 800 and 2,000 – and most of them have not previously been members of any Islamic militant group. Even Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, chief US military spokesman in Iraq puts the number of foreign resistance, fighters entering Iraq at no more than 50-70 a month.

According to a report by the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS): “The vast majority of Saudi militants who have entered Iraq were not terrorist sympathisers before the war; and were radicalised almost exclusively by the coalition invasion.” The report continues, “Most of the Saudi militants were motivated by revulsion at the idea of an Arab land being occupied by a non-Arab country. These feelings are intensified by the images of the occupation they see on television and the internet ... the catalyst most often cited [in interrogations] is Abu Ghaib, though images from Guantánamo also feed into the pathology.”

Meanwhile, estimates of the total strength of the insurgency is put around 30,000, the overwhelming majority of whom are Iraqis.

C. Another myth is the assertion that the resistance is confined to Sunni supporters of the ousted Ba’athist regime. This belies the fact that a majority of Shia opposed the US occupation since at least 2004, if not before.

Brookings quotes the 2006 poll conducted by “World Opinion Poll.org – PIPA. It found 61 % of all Iraqis approved of attacks on US-led forces. Among the Sunnis the figure was 92 %. Among Shia the figure was 62 %. Only among the Kurds, many of whom hope the US-led occupation will deliver them autonomy, is the figure for those approving of attacks on US forces a minority at 15 %.

Political re-alignment/ the Shias and Al Sadr

Such is the pressure from mass opposition to the occupation that all the parties represented in the government (despite their frequent willingness to collaborate with the US) campaigned in the 2005 election on an anti-occupation ticket.

Part of the current offensive by the US forces involves the destruction of Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, which the US claim is armed and encouraged by Iran. But the truth is more complicated.

Al Sadr is the son of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Sadeq al-Sadr and son-in-law of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir, both of whom were murdered by Saddam. The clerical family has been long associated with opposition to Saddam’s regime and paid the cost in blood. In 2004 as the US was pulverising Sunni Fallujah, Al Sadr offered important support and solidarity to besieged resistance fighters most of whom were Sunnis.

Al Sadr is also hostile to Iranian influence. As Patrick Cockburn commented in Counterpunch, “In spite of US efforts to link him [Al Sadr] to Iran and [most recently to] claim that he has fled there, he and his movement have traditionally been suspicious of the Iranians, and they of him.” (http://www.counterpunch.org/patrick02152007.html)

Al Sadr has consistently condemned sectarian attacks on Sunnis. After a murderous sectarian attack in February this year on the Shia Golden Mosque
in Samarra which produced retaliatory attacks by some on Sunni mosques, Al Sadr said:

“It was not the Sunnis who attacked the shrine of Imam Al Hadi, God’s peace be upon him, but rather the occupation [forces] and Baathists...God damn them. We should not attack Sunni mosques. I have asked the Mahdi Army to protect both Shia and Sunni Shrines.”

**US/Iraqi complicity in sectarian murders**

The complicity of the US backed government of Iraq and its ministries in sectarian murder squads is widely commented on. To quote just one example, in May 2005, 15 Sunnis, including anti-occupation clerics, were taken from a mosque, murdered and their bodies dumped in Baghdad. At the funeral of one of the clerics, Hareth al-Dhari, secretary general of the Association of Muslim Scholars, said at the Umm al Qura mosque, “This is state terrorism by the Ministry of Interior.”

The Muslim cleric had been taken from his mosque by uniformed troops of the Wolf Brigade, a police commando unit, accompanied by members of the Badr Brigade militia loyal to the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, the backbone of the Shi’ite coalition dominated government).

Examples like this are multiplying (see Crying Wolf: Media Disinformation and Death Squads in Occupied Iraq by Max Fuller)

http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=FUL20051110&articleId=1230

The Wolf Brigade, recruited from military officers associated with Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath party, are said to be among the most effective units under the Iraqi government’s control but are feared because of their human rights abuses.

The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq controls the Interior Ministry and is the senior party upon which the US occupation depends for political support. The US trains its strongest. The Iran-trained Badr Brigade (which fought with Iran against Iraqis during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war) is the armed wing of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution.

**British & US shananigans**

On 19 September 2005, British troops with tanks and armoured cars smashed their way into Jamiat police station in Basra, demolishing a wall and several buildings in the process. There they freed two British SAS soldiers who had been arrested earlier in a car outside the station, dressed in traditional Arab clothing and heavily armed. Between five and nine Iraqis were killed in the incident. It was claimed that explosives and remote control detonators were found in their car. Iraqis claimed that the two men were planning to set off bombs in the centre of Basra during a religious festival. Despite an Iraqi judge issuing an arrest warrant for the two men, no investigation took place as the British claimed the men were immune from Iraqi law.

Three weeks later, there was another similar incident involving Americans: A number of Iraqis apprehended two men disguised in Arab dress as they tried to blow up a booby-trapped car in the middle of a residential area in western Baghdad on Tuesday. The men were apprehended as they left their Caprice car. Local people found they looked suspicious and when they were detained it was discovered that they were Americans and called the Iraqi puppet police.

**Bush cronies in charge**

Looking at the record of one key player in the Iraq occupation lends weight to the allegations of Coalition complicity in the death squads. Bush crony John Negroponte with a background in intelligence and covert operations in Latin America was appointed US Ambassador to the United Nations in 2001. There he got the unanimous approval of the Security Council for a resolution demanding Saddam Hussein decommission his “Weapons of Mass Destruction”—weapons that did not exist, paving the way for the 2003 invasion. He was appointed Ambassador to Iraq (2004 - 2005), and was appointed Director of National Intelligence in February 2005.

Negroponte was from 1981 to 1985 the U.S. ambassador to Honduras under President Reagan. During this time, military aid to Honduras grew from $4 million to $77.4 million a year, as the US stepped up its covert war against the democratically elected Sandinista government of Nicaragua. According to John MacGaffin, the CIA’s former Associate Deputy Director for clandestine operations, “Negroponte is a guy who plays hardball. He’s a man who understands the whole range of counterintelligence, intelligence and covert action. They’re all parts of foreign policy and protecting ourselves.”

(Newsweek, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6989173/site/newsweek/page/2/)

These brutal covert actions by US forces (either directly or through its collaborators) have been supplemented with divide and rule tactics to exacerbate communal tensions.

**Questions of oil**

Meanwhile the occupying powers are manoeuvring to ensure Iraq’s potential oil wealth falls into the lap of Western multinationals. It was recently revealed by Al-Jazeera that the British government have been pushing a report by the International Tax and Investment Center (ITIC) - a Washington-based think-tank backed by a host of multinationals, including oil companies such as Shell and BP - at Iraqi officials in Baghdad. The UK is pressuring the Iraqi government to sign long-term production-sharing agreements with British oil companies. Production-sharing agreements allow companies to make vast profits once they have recouped their costs. Greg Muttitt, an oil campaigner with Platform, said that the British government was “using their position as a military occupier to influence and shape the future of the country’s economy in the interests of powerful companies”.

British diplomats have been involved in “extensive efforts since at least 2004 to push for companies such as BP and Shell to receive long-term contracts, which would give them exclusive rights to extract Iraq’s huge oilfields”, which would exclude Iraqis.

The ITIC is organising further lobbying by oil executives with senior Iraqi government figures in the run up to hydrocarbon law due this summer to push for a lax tax regime on Western oil interests.

Al Jazeera reports: “Iraq has proven oil reserves of 115 billion barrels, with
An incident, on Tuesday March 6th, described by US forces in Afghanistan as a "complex ambush" has left at least eight civilians dead. The incident occurred on the road from the eastern city of Jalalabad to Pakistan when a suicide bomber targeted a convoy, sparking a firefight. Thousands of local people took to the streets, accusing the Americans of deliberately firing on the civilians and shouting "Death to America, Death to Karzai", referring to the Afghan president, and blaming the US patrol for shooting passers-by. A few hours later Karzai went on national TV and asked the US Army to conduct an investigation as, “it appeared” he said, US soldiers fired on passers-by and drivers indiscriminately.

This latest incident, coupled with increasing fears of a renewed Talibanded spring offensive, brings Afghanistan back into the front pages.

‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ in 2001 was supposed to have liberated Afghanistan from Taliban rule and establish a stable pro-western Government, led by President Karzai, an ex-CIA employee. In 2006, 5 years later, there were more casualties from the war than at any time since – and the situation during the first couple of months of 2007 appears to be getting worse.

A Talibanded insurgency is extremely active on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border. Insurgents have imported suicide bombing, improvised but advanced explosive technology and global communication strategies from Iraq. In the south of the country British and Allied forces fight daily battles while almost 50% of schools are permanently closed. The international presence in Afghanistan is being gradually perceived as a foreign occupation rather than a ‘liberating force’.

In the 2001 war, the US-led coalition, instead of defeating the Talibanded al Qaeda forces, merely pushed them out of the centre and into the Pashtun tribal belt on the Afghan-Pakistani border. While the Pakistani President Musharraf is seen as a close ally to Bush, in reality the Pakistani Secret Service (ISI) is actively supporting the Talibanded leadership. This has been Pakistan’s strategy all along and Talibanded leaders are openly operating out of Quetta, in Baluchistan Province of western Pakistan.

The Talibanded have drawn on fugitives from Afghanistan…their limited institutions and the ruthlessness of their retribution to those who they perceive to be collaborators have neutralised most of the Afghan population. Opium production is at record levels and many community leaders accuse the Karzai led government of being the main source of abuse and corruption.

When the Bush Administration overthrew the Talibanded after 9/11, it did so with what has been lovingly called a light footprint. It used CIA operatives, among them Karzai and his followers, and its Special Forces to co-ordinate what was then called the Northern Alliance….supporting all of them by airpower. The UN was brought into the game after what had appeared to be a quick military victory and efforts were made to form a new government and manage a political transition. The formation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was to provide security to the new leaders and build a new police force and Army. In 2003 ISAF came under NATO command – the first ever NATO operation outside Europe!!

About 32,000 NATO, US, British and allied troops are currently engaged in Afghanistan while another more secretive 8,000 men and women are engaged in counter-Talibanded operations by a variety of ways and means.

Inside this mayhem, Afghanistan remains one of the world’s poorest countries just outside some States in sub-Saharan Africa. Last year, despite massive foreign aid, the domestic per capita income was raised by about $13 – hardly enough to buy Afghani citizens a case of Coke from the recently opened bottling plant near Kabul.

Lack of electricity, rising crime and high unemployment are making life very difficult for Afghans. The only part of the economy booming is the opium trade. According to the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, poppy production in Afghanistan in 2006 reached a record 6,100 metric tons surpassing the 2005 total by 49%!!

During the last 6 years, the Western powers appear to me to be contemptuous of nation building, wary of investing seriously in rebuilding the country and very aware of criticisms of mission creep. The US went there to unseat the Talibanded, as they went to Iraq to unseat Saddam, and in Kosovo to unseat Milosevic….then they moved on. They picked allies only on the basis of their willingness to work under US control rather than any capacity to bring stability and improve the life of their citizens.

You can argue forever whether the glass in Afghanistan is half full or half empty. Many say perhaps we should guard ourselves from expecting too much too soon.

My position is that the glass is much less than half full – it is resting on a wobbly table – and it may soon overturn. And that would bring no good news for anybody around the region or the world!!

While the situation in Afghanistan, and perhaps that in Lebanon, is seen by many in the Left and the anti-war movement as being different than that of Iraq and Palestine, I sincerely hope the few notes above may help clarify some issues and focus our mind on a situation that, methinks, is of the same quality and danger as that of the US invasion of Iraq.

PS
Unbeknown to many, Ireland is making an albeit small contribution to ISAF in Afghanistan. In ISAF’s website at http://www.afnorth.nato.int/ISAF/structure/structure_structure.htm, Ireland is listed as one of the 37 contributing nations. A Department of Defence press statement, dated June 27 2006, says that Irish troops are to remain in Afghanistan http://www.defence.ie/website.nsf/Release+/ID/368E1A5ADF7892738025719B003B8917

Latest News from Afghanistan

by Michael Youlton (iawm)
Facts about Lebanon

by Dr. Abdullah Sayegh (iawm)

Lebanon is a small country of 4500 square miles and a population of 4.3 million. Modern Lebanon was the homeland of the Phoenicians, where the city states were the prevalent political system and their seafaring activities spread the use of the alphabet and the use of money in trade along the Med and beyond.

The current Lebanese borders were finalised by the French, the colonial power that took over from the Ottoman Empire, after World War I. On September 1, 1920, France formed the Greater State of Lebanon as one of several ethno-religious sections, initially, within Syria. It was largely a Christian enclave but also included Muslims and Druze. The Republic of Lebanon was formed in September 1926 to the chagrin of the Muslim population who were very reluctant to accept separation from Syria. Lebanon was finally given independence in 1943 from France while France was under German occupation.

Lebanon is a mosaic of ethnic and religious groups—an extremely sensitive political reality. The official census of 1932 was the base of power distribution between the sects and shaped the modern history of Lebanon. The Christian Maronite community was given political control through their presidency and their 6:5 dominance of the number of parliamentarians over the Muslims. While the Prime Minister (who had to be a Sunni) had also some power, the Shiias were given only a nominal role through their Speaker. The Orthodox Christians were allocated the position of the Vice Speaker in parliament. This situation exasperated further the Shia whose number grew over the years while a large number of Christian left Lebanon for greener pastures and better opportunities. The current proportion of Shiias (>32%) to Sunni to Christians bears no relationship to the 1932 situation—the distribution of power, however, remains stuck to the past.

Influence of the creation of Israel

Lebanon has been influenced greatly by the creation of the state of Israel and the wars that followed. In 1949, more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees were settled temporarily in Lebanon. This number has increased not only due to the further movement of refugees but also through the natural population increase within the Palestinian refugee community whose stay in Lebanon has become permanent. The Palestinians today, numbering 'officially' about 400,000, while their total number is said to be close to 700,000. They are deprived from the basic right of work permits, land and business ownership while surviving on the charity of UN agencies through rations and other services as well as from temporary employment in menial jobs.

The civil war

The Lebanese civil war that began in 1976 was the result of social pressures due to the unequal distribution of wealth of power between the ethnic communities as well as the aspiration of Palestinians to have Lebanon as a political and military base in their war to get back their homeland.

The Lebanese civil war settled in 1990 with the Taif accord. This envisaged a new political structure and power sharing between Muslims and Christians,

Iraq – the lies continue

billions more thought to be as yet undiscovered, but since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq the country has been in chaos and unable to adequately exploit its own resources.

New legislation, drafted by Iraq's fledgling government, is aimed at reviving the country's oil revenues, but critics say the majority of the money will be going to multinationals.

The oil companies will operate under production sharing agreements (PSAs), long-term contracts, signed between oil companies and the nation which owns the resources. Critics say the agreements will lock Iraq into unfair arrangements at a time when Iraq is not in a position to negotiate.

Figures from the International Energy Agency show that PSAs are only used for about 12 per cent of world oil reserves and critics argue this means there must be other, fairer methods.

A 2005 study by Platform shows that not only would Iraq be likely to lose billions of $s in oil revenue under the likely terms of oil contracts, but returns for oil companies would be as much as 162%, "far in excess of usual industry minimum targets of around 12% return on investment". (http://english.aljazeera.net/EN/ExeRes/601E7480-CD0D-41C9-BDC8-785EF669FDF.Ap.html)

The Iraqi Constitution, has the sell-off of national resources and privatisation virtually written in:

Article 25: The State guarantees the reform of the Iraqi economy in accordance with modern economic principles to ensure the full investment of its resources, diversification of its sources and the encouragement and the development of the private sector.

Article 26: The state guarantees the encouragement of investments in the various sectors. This will be organized by law.

Not only is the occupation of Iraq causing untold misery and stirring up sectarian conflict, the future of Iraq’s oil wealth is being prepared for a boot sale to Western oil interests. None of this would be possible but for the invasion and occupation. Foreign troops, covert operations, spooks and predatory oil interests are not saving Iraq from civil war, they are making it more likely.

We must demand that troops leave immediately.
through which the power of the Christian president was reduced for the benefit of the Sunni Prime Minister. The number of members of Parliament was increased to 128 with equal numbers of Christians and Muslims. Further re-distribution of seats within the religious group was also envisaged.

Unfortunately, the Taif Accord was never implemented. Its intention to develop a more democratic society remained a dead letter, mainly due to the presence of the Syrian forces that entered the conflict to ostensibly defend the Muslim population and ended controlling all aspects of Lebanese political life. Many Lebanese politicians co-operated fully with the Syrians either for personal gain or because of their belief that the Syrian Army would help the Lebanese liberate parts of their country occupied by Israel.

**Rafik Al Hariri and his legacy**

Rafik Al Hariri played a crucial role in shaping Lebanon after the 1976 civil war, with the full co-operation of the Syrians. He was a main contributor in the framing of the Taif accord and was the Prime Minister for most of the time after 1992. He led the reconstruction of Beirut and other infrastructural projects such as the airport and major roads leading to resorts. His fiscal policies were, however, very controversial and resulted in heavy indebtedness for the country. **Today Lebanon has the largest per capita debt in the world.** On Feb 15 2005 Hariri was assassinated and his death engulfed the political system into a deep crisis.

The Cedar Revolution followed and the Syrian Army was forced to withdraw from Lebanon under international and popular pressure. The main factors that made the Syrian unpopular were their corrupt intelligence officers and the marginalisation of the major political powers, mainly the Christians.

**Israeli invasions of Lebanon**

Lebanon has been attacked by Israel a number of times since 1949 with major invasions in 1978, in 1982 (when the Israelis reached Beirut) and the last attack in July 2006.

Many Lebanese were involved in resistance to Israeli and fought with Palestinian prior to the establishment of Israel. When Israel occupied parts of Lebanon, the resistance was mainly initiated by leftist and nationalist, including the Palestinians.

After 1982, Hizbullah, a political party founded by Shiites and influenced by the principle of Islamic revolution in Iran, began playing a major role in the resistance movement through their military wing, Islamic Resistance. Hizbullah has progressed to become a very influential party in Lebanese political life and it now constitutes the largest single block within the Lebanese Parliament. Hizbullah has a successful social service network and showed high skills in gaining the trust of the poorest section of Lebanese communities across sects. Its political understanding of the complexity of Lebanese society and their flexibility make them accepted and respected by nationalist and leftist Lebanese political elite - especially after the 1996 ceasefire agreement with Israel, when the Islamic resistance was accepted as a Lebanese resistance force by the international community, including the USA and France. In May 2000, the Israelis were forced to withdraw from Lebanese soil under the pressure of resistance, mainly Hizbullah. The Lebanese government recognised Hizbullah as a legitimate resistance force with the main objective: of freeing of Lebanese prisoners taken from Lebanese soil to Israel and liberating the occupied Shabaa farms, close to the border.

**The current post—July '06 situation**

Following the defeat of the Israeli invasion in July/August '06, and attempting to counter the growing popular support of Hizbullah, the Seniora Government approved the setting up of a special UN Court enquiring into the assassination of Rafik Harriri without the approval of the president and any discussion in the cabinet.

The Shia Ministers immediately resigned from the cabinet, along with Yacoub Saraf—a Christian. Large demonstrations and strikes engulfed Lebanon - the largest in Lebanon a main city. The USA, France and their allies supported PM Seniora and his government openly demanding the heads of Hizbullah and labelling those supporting the resistance as terrorists. Large sums of 'aid' were also offered to Seniora.

The opposition is a wide coalition of political parties including Hizbullah, Amal, a host of national patriotic leftist and socialist parties—including most of Lebanese ex-prime ministers. These organisations represent almost all Shiites, the majority of Christians and a good proportion of Sunni and Druze political currents. The opposition is also supported by Iran and

On other hand, the government parties which have the majority in parliament through their electoral arrangements are professionals turned to politicians. They include the Lebanese Forces party (Christians) and Socialist Democrats Progressive Party (Druze), and a few Christian politician and personalities. Most of them were either employees or had links with the Hariri family business group—the biggest employer of Lebanese in both Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.

Hizbullah and the combined opposition are demanding a national unity government to prepare for new elections. Their argument is that the current government has lost its legitimacy, has no support of a major section of the population (Shiites) and did not respect its programme.

The political and financial support by the American and the French officials has strengthened the hand of the Seniora government in rejecting all compromise and sabotaging all efforts in finding a solution to the crisis. There is high profile propaganda effort to display the situation as being a Sunni v Shiite conflict, rather than a political problem that can be resolved through a new election.

To conclude, the Lebanese situation has marked similarities with the situation prevailing in both Palestine and Iraq. The strategy of the Empire is to provoke sectarian conflict as a means of consolidating its hold on people and resources.
It is business as usual in Palestine, as Israel continues to turn Gaza into a gigantic prison camp and inflicts a daily toll of repression and slaughter in the West Bank.

Last November the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert praised the US war on Iraq as “a great operation that has brought stability to the Middle East.” More recently his Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, often cited as the most rational and progressive member of the Israeli cabinet, has warned the US “not to show weakness” by withdrawing from Iraq. Israel is pushing for action against Iran, and few doubt that if the US dithers Israel is quite capable of bombing Iran’s nuclear reactors, a truly apocalyptic scenario.

International Court of Justice Opinion
......a dead letter

In July 2004 the International Court of Justice, found Israel’s Apartheid Wall to be illegal. The ICJ ruled that “All States are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction [they]... have in addition the obligation... to ensure compliance by Israel with international humanitarian law...²

This landmark decision seemed to give the Palestinians and their supporters a powerful instrument with which to fight Israeli oppression and western backing for it. In particular, European campaigners fought for the suspension of the Association Agreement that gives Israel trading privileges conditional on observance of human rights.

Alas, the ICJ advisory opinion has remained a dead letter. Not alone has Israel continued to build its Wall within Palestinian lands, which when completed will be more than twice the length of the supposed “border” between Israelis and Palestinians, but western support for Israeli apartheid has, if anything, increased.

A recent plea to Irish Foreign Affairs Minister Ahern from a Catholic Church delegation - including two bishops - for a review of the Association Agreement met with the standard reply: “The Government has taken the view that it is essential to maintain engagement with Israel...Let’s be clear that any proposal for suspension would require unanimity in the [European] Council, which will not happen.”

Nonetheless, when in the first fully democratic election held in an Arab country the Palestinians punished Fatah for its years of ineffectuality and corruption by voting for a Hamas administration, the EU followed the USA by boycotting and isolating the Palestinians, thus punishing them with threat of starvation for not having voted as instructed - a policy, be it noted, that itself violates international humanitarian law.

Another instance of Irish Government collusion

Not alone does the Irish government follow EU policy by participating in this collective punishment of a supposedly “protected people” (under the 4th Geneva Convention), but the Irish ambassador to Israel spends much of his time securing lucrative contacts for Cement Roadstone Holdings (CRH), the Irish multinational deeply implicated in building Israel’s illegal Wall, to say nothing of the equally illegal settlements and Jews-only roads within the West Bank. This clearly violates Ireland’s obligations under the terms of the ICJ advisory opinion.

Clearly the Irish government’s collusion with Israeli oppression is on the same level as the transformation of Shannon Airport into a US air-base.

The Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign has called upon the Irish people to take matters into their own hands by boycotting Israeli goods (including blood diamonds cut and polished in Tel Aviv), culture, sport, academia and tourism until such time as Israel ends its criminal oppression of the Palestinian people. If we cannot directly influence the Israeli government, we can pressurise our own government to take an independent stand that reflects the Irish people’s long-standing solidarity with the Palestinians.
The Hamas and Fatah movements formed a long-elusive unity govern-
ment on Thursday, March 15th, hoping to end bloody infighting and
lead the Palestinians out of years-
long international isolation.

Israel immediately said, however,
that it would not deal with the new
government. Prime Minister Ismail
Haniyeh of Hamas announced the
final coalition agreement and
platform after months of stop-and-
go negotiations. It is to be approved
by the Palestinian parliament on
Saturday.

The coalition platform posted on
Hamas and Fatah websites calls for
continued observance of a truce
with Israel. The new government’s
platform also includes a pledge to
respect past peace deals, but not an
explicit recognition of Israel. It also
affirms the Palestinians’ right to re-
sist and “defend themselves against
any Israeli aggression.”

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman
Mark Regev said his government
will boycott the coalition govern-
ment and encourage other coun-
tries to do the same because its
program falls short of the interna-
tional conditions for acceptance
that include recognition of the Jew-
ish state.

“Unfortunately the new Palestinian
government seems to have said no
to the three benchmarks of the in-
ternational community,” Regev said.
“Accordingly, Israel will not deal
with this new government and we
hope the international community
will stand firmly by its own prin-
ciples and refuse to deal with a gov-
ernment that says no to peace and
no to reconciliation.”

Western countries have said they
will wait for the new government to
take office before deciding whether
to lift economic sanctions against
the Palestinian government.

“The new government would do its
best to bring about an end to the
boycott and “maintain relations
with all the international commu-
nity….” PM Haniyeh said, adding
that he hoped the new government
will “launch a new era” for the Pal-
estinians.

“This is the right moment to move
toward the peace process,” Nabil
Abu Rdeneh, a senior aide to Presi-
dent Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah, told
reporters. “If the international com-

munity is serious, if it is looking to-
ward stability in the Middle East,
this is the right moment to go
ahead” by implementing the U.S.-
backed “road map” peace plan.

Haniyeh presented the Cabinet
lineup Thursday — nine ministers
from Hamas and six from Fatah —
to Abbas, who accepted it. Haniyeh
and Abbas agreed to the power-
sharing deal last month in Saudi
Arabia, but had spent the past few
weeks ironing out the final details.

The final stage of the coalition talks
dealt with one of the most difficult

issues — who would fill the
post of Interior Minister and
assume control over the secu-

rity forces. Most of the veteran
members are loyal to Fatah,
but Hamas last year formed
its own 5,600-member militia.

Officials identified the new
minister as Hani Kawasmi, a
senior Interior Ministry civil
servant who has good relations with
Hamas and Fatah, but does not be-
long to either party. Mustafa
Barghouti, the incoming informa-
tion minister, confirmed the ap-
pointment. Other key appoint-
ments included Salam Fayyad, an
internationally respected economist,
as finance minister, and Ziad Abu
Amr, an independent lawmaker.

To conclude, the Mecca Agreement
between Fatah and Hamas, bro-
kered by Saudi Arabia, that set the
tone for the establishment of the
National Unity Government, is a
setback for Israel and its supporters
in the West. It is a setback because
Hamas has conceded little or no po-

citical ground to Fatah in the Agree-

ment, which neither requires its
signatories to “recognise” Israel, nor
to renounce armed resistance
against Israeli occupation, nor to
accept previous agreements with
Israel.

PS. For a longer analytical article
on the same lines, please consult
our comrade David Morrison’s arti-
cle entitled ‘The Mecca Agreement’
in:

www.david-morrison.org.uk

Palestinian organisations
shake hands and form
government

by Michael Youlton (IPSC & iawm)