

Iraqi People Speak Out For National Sovereignty

by Hussein Askary

All indications from the ground in Iraq point to the fact that the Iraqi people are expressing a strong feeling that the American and British occupation forces are not welcome in the country. This might sound frustrating for some Americans who supported the war and for the U.S. troops who might have thought they were fighting for the freedom of the Iraqi people, but it is true. The U.S. and British armies, now occupying Iraq, are obliged under international law to restore stability, security, territorial integrity, and vital services for the Iraqi population such as clean water, electricity, food, and medical care. To that extent, the Iraqi population seems to be willing to cooperate with the occupation forces to restore normal life in the short term. Anything beyond that—for example, if the United States and Britain insist on staying there as some sort of colonial military administration or choosing the political leadership for the country—will result in a bloody confrontation with the Iraqi people.

Surely, almost all Iraqis feel some sort of a relief that Saddam's dictatorship has ended. Nonetheless, they strongly oppose the presence of any foreign forces on their soil. This has been expressed by many Iraqis who have been interviewed in the media, and by those demonstrating daily in many Iraqi cities and in front of the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, the headquarters of the U.S. military command in the Iraqi capital. After years of U.S.-backed sanctions that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, and the recent terrifying and often indiscriminate bombing campaign against civilian targets, Iraqis have no flowers or cheers to offer the "invaders." The barbaric looting and arson operations against vital economic and cultural institutions, conducted under the passive eye of U.S. troops, just confirmed to the Iraqi population that this is another "Mongol invasion" to destroy the culture and identity of this nation.

'The Day-After' Plans Don't Work

None of the U.S. "post-Saddam" schemes for ruling Iraq have worked. They missed a "tiny" detail when they planned this: the Iraqi people. These plans, like other lies pushed by Vice President Dick Cheney, to the effect that the Iraqis would not resist an invading force and would come out to welcome the U.S. troops as liberators, were worked out by the fascist neo-conservative civilian gang in the Department of Defense and the some Iraqi "experts," such as Ahmed Chalabi and Kanan Makiya. These lies cost the lives of thousands of Iraqis and scores of U.S. and British troops.

On April 15, the U.S.-backed Iraqi "opposition" groups were supposed to have the first meeting inside Iraq to discuss the post-Saddam transitional administration. The meeting was organized by the U.S. retired army general and "Viceroy of Iraq," Jay Garner, at the ancient site of Ur, outside the southern city of al-Nasiriya. While the meeting was boycotted by the largest opposition groups representing the Shi'a majority in southern Iraq—the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and al-Daawa party—in the streets of al-Nasiriya tens of thousands of Iraqis were demonstrating in protest against this meeting. Shouting slogans like "Yes to freedom, Yes to Islam, No to America, No to Saddam," the 20,000 protesters made clear their rejection of any occupation government. They carried posters saying their leadership was in Najaf, the Shi'ite holy city, where the Shi'ite religious leadership sits. The deputy chairman and spokesman for SCIRI, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, convened a press conference in Tehran where he stated: "We will not participate in the meeting in Nasiriya, and we have told that to the Americans and to other countries. What is most important is independence. . . . We refuse to put ourselves under the thumb of the Americans or any other country, because that is not in the

Iraqis' interest. . . . Iraq needs an Iraqi interim government. Anything other than this tramples the rights of the Iraqi people, and will be a return to the era of colonization."

The meeting was a non-starter, for which U.S. pro-consul Zalmay Khalilzad and Viceroy General Garner had pre-prepared a final statement to be rubber-stamped by the participants. The statement had such formulations as: creating an Iraqi federation; de facto dividing the country along ethnic lines; and removing the characteristic of Islam from the state. Of course, this was rejected even by some of those who were at the meeting. Others even rejected the existence of an American administrator for the interim period, such as Garner himself. "We will press for an Iraqi civilian administration, regardless of what the Americans say. An administration by Garner is not acceptable," said Mowaffak al-Rubaie, an Iraqi physician and opposition activist. The only decision which they agreed upon was to convene a similar meeting in ten days.

Aside from the boycott by SCIRI, the biggest power-broker in post-Saddam Iraq, there are the Kurds. Reports have it that they are unwilling to compromise on expanding their borders to include the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and the Kurdish parts of Mosul. This is strongly rejected by the majority of Iraqis and also by Iraq's neighbors, especially Turkey.

The rejection of U.S.-imposed Iraqi administrators reached a bloody pitch in the northern city of Mosul, where American soldiers shot protesters in two consecutive days, killing 12 and wounding dozens. According to TV coverage of a demonstration in Mosul, the protesters gathered at the city's administration headquarters, where Mishaan al-Jobouri, a former Iraqi official who left the country in the 1990s, and recently returned to work with the Americans, was speaking. The demonstrators were protesting against him; it appears they saw him as a collaborator. (This brought to the minds of many observers, what U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said about anti-war demonstrators in Washington who are "having their full freedom" to express their views, while in "Saddam's Iraq, protesters get their tongues cut" by the regime. But during the week of April 7, Iraqi protesters got their lives cut short by U.S. troops.) Al-Jobouri, a member of the dominant al-Jobouri clan in northern Iraq, is not acknowledged by all the clan's leaders and the population in Mosul as a leader. Therefore, he tried to impose himself as governor of Mosul with the help of U.S. guns.

This situation can only get worse. The only solution is to have a local government selected by the residents of Mosul and the rural clans around the city. In Mosul, there is a strong disdain toward the occupying force and those Iraqis marching under the protection of American guns.

Iraqis Reorganize Themselves

Despite ostensible cooperation with American authorities in Baghdad, on a temporary basis, to reestablish law and order, the Shi'ites under the leadership of the religious

hierarchy in Najaf, are actually setting up their own organizations. In Karbala, another holy city north of Najaf, a 35-member Local Committee elected Mohammad Hussein Nasrullah as governor general of Karbala Province. This was done without coordination with the U.S. Army or the U.S.-backed Iraqi opposition. A spokesman for the local administration stated that the situation in Karbala is satisfactory, adding that the people are awaiting the formation of an Iraqi Interim Administration. He said that the people are holding regular demonstrations demanding that an Iraqi undertake the job of leading the Interim Administration soon, rejecting a foreign national to serve as ruler of Iraq. He said that staff of government offices and hospitals have been at their jobs. The British daily *Guardian* noted that this "sends a signal to Washington that an organized alternative power already exists in Iraq, whatever coalition of exiles and local politicians emerges from meetings this week," referring to the Nasiriya meeting.

The Howza, the assembly of Shi'ite clerics based in Najaf, reportedly sent out instructions to mosques throughout the country, through its underground communications system, which functioned under Saddam Hussein's rule. The instructions told clerics and civic leaders to "establish local committees . . . to organize the affairs of the neighborhood," and to organize all civic and religious activities. One senior imam at the Buratha Mosque in Baghdad was quoted saying, "With the direction of the clerics of Najaf, we want to return this looted stuff to the people," referring to the goods looted in the days of anarchy. "We've managed to secure the water plants and electricity sub-stations and all the hospitals in the neighborhood. The next stage is that we want to have central control from Najaf over what's happening in the streets." As the *Guardian* noted, the emergence of Shi'ite defense committees "overshadowed" the return to work of police in Baghdad. As if to symbolize the power of the Shi'ites in the capital, the Shi'ite neighborhood, Saddam City, has been quickly renamed Sadr City, after Baqir al-Sadr, a Shi'ite cleric killed by the regime. There are other densely populated quarters in Baghdad, where the Shi'ites are a majority.

However, in order to cut short any attempts to give this kind of civilian organizing a sectarian character, both Sunni and Shi'ite clerics went out in joint press conferences to declare that they are working together as united Iraqis, and not simply along sectarian lines. Baghdad, home to 5 million people, is a melting pot of all Iraqis: Shi'ites from the south, Sunnis, Kurds, Christians, Turkmen, and even some Jews. These include highly educated groups, with a strong nationalist identity, and would be difficult to divide on ethnic or sectarian lines.

The danger lurks in the attempt by the U.S.-British side to "divide and conquer" and try to buy support from different factions within the various ethnic and religious groups. This already failed dramatically in Najaf, where Abdul-Majid al-Khoie, a U.S.-U.K.-supported Shi'ite cleric, was killed by an



Ahmad al-Chalabi (right) with U.S. Sen. Trent Lott. Al-Chalabi, the neo-cons' choice to run Iraq, is a British citizen and convicted swindler, viewed by Iraqis as an Anglo-American puppet.

angry mob on April 10. Al-Khoie, who had just arrived in Najaf with the U.S. forces, was regarded as a collaborator with the Anglo-American occupation. Later on, the different Shi'ite groups decided to stay united behind Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the supreme religious leader in Iraq, in order to avoid schisms. In Mosul, the case of Mishaa al-Jobouri is obvious. In Basra, a similar revolt was raging against former General al-Tamimi, who was appointed by the British as governor of the city.

If the U.S. and British forces insist on having a puppet regime in spite of the opposition, they would have to recruit different minority factions in the north and the south, and former Baath Party officials to rule by force, with money and weapons pouring from the United States. This would create a condition of civil war.

Al-Chalabi 'Should Get a Visa To Enter Iraq'

On the other side, the Pentagon and other warhawks are still insisting on having convicted bank swindler Ahmad al-Chalabi, leader of the exile Iraqi National Conference (INC), as their choice of leader in the transitional government of Iraq. Although Iraqi public protest forced him to state that he had no such ambitions, and he stayed away from the al-Nasiriya meeting, he is still attempting to have his own army and leadership position in Iraq.

Al-Chalabi, a British citizen who has not been in Baghdad since 1958, is not known to anyone in the country. Furthermore, he has a pending 22-year prison sentence on 13 charges of fraud in Jordan. He almost collapsed the Jordanian

currency in 1989, through bankrupting his Petra Bank in Amman, the third largest bank in Jordan at the time. His case is similar to the fraud committed by the American Enron Corp. In addition, in January 2002, the U.S. State Department suspended funding to the INC, citing "financial management and internal control weaknesses." This was one of the signs of the State Department's discomfort with Chalabi's group. In spite of this blacklist of "demerits" and disqualifications, Chalabi is still being promoted by Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and "chicken-hawk" propagandist Richard Perle. Probably, they think that these are fitting qualities for a political leader.

With millions of dollars of his own money and much more from the Pentagon, Chalabi is trying to create his own army, in order to impose himself on the administration in Baghdad. Many observers describe the 700-man Iraqi Freedom Force (IFF) as Chalabi's bodyguards, to protect him from

the Iraqi people. He can recruit more unemployed and desperate young people to his private army with money, but this will only lead to more destabilization of the the country, and generate more hatred against the invasion force and its agents.

As one Iraqi in exile said: "Chalabi should leave Iraq now for his own safety. Next time he should seek a tourist visa to enter the country."

The Regional Dimension

Before the major military operations were concluded in Iraq, Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell went out publicly threatening Syria and Iran for supporting terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction. Of course that proved to everyone in the region that the intention behind launching the war against Iraq was to launch a series of imperial wars against Arab and Muslim nations, within a larger "clash of civilizations" scheme. This was the least conducive to the stability in Iraq itself. It should be remembered that the Shi'ites in Iraq, representing 65% of the Iraqi population, are historically and religiously tied to the predominantly Shi'ite nation of Iran. Most of the Iraqi religious leaders, who were prosecuted by Saddam Hussein's regime, sought refuge in Iran in the 1980s and 1990s. The largest Iraqi Shi'ite political and militant groups have been working under Iranian protection and support. Syria, too, played a role in supporting these groups against Saddam in the 1980s. The Iranians would regard it as a natural political and strategic matter to support and encourage the Iraqis in defying and resisting U.S. attempts to occupy and administer the country, which could then be a

staging ground from which similar military and political campaigns would be launched against Iran itself.

The Iranian supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, expressed that explicitly. In his Friday Prayer sermon in Tehran on April 11, Khamenei, the religious leader of a Persian-speaking nation, read a long statement in Arabic, commenting on the war in Iraq. In the front row of the attendants, there were a number of Iraqi opposition leaders, such as SCIRI's al-Hakim. While Khamenei expressed his and the Iranian nation's joy over the collapse of Saddam's regime, he stressed that the current war "was a war between two evils, Saddam's regime and the United States and Britain." He said: "In this war we decided to remain neutral, but we shall not remain neutral when there is a struggle between the occupation and the Iraqi people." He also warned Iraqi opposition leaders, that "their cooperation with the occupying forces would be regarded as a stain of shame."

Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, a moderate, also condemned any attempts to install a puppet regime in Iraq, and demanded that the Iraqi people be given the freedom to choose their own government. At a press conference in April 16, Khatami said, "The Islamic Republic condemns the U.S.-British aggression against Iraq," stressing though that this should never be interpreted as Tehran's support for the Baghdad regime. "We have suffered a lot from the regime of Saddam Hussein," Khatami said. "But that a world power seeks to impose its own will on others, relying on its modern warfare technology, regardless of the role of the UN, is also dangerous."

Now, ironically, there is a good opportunity for the U.S. Administration to repair the damage caused by this war. It can cooperate with the Iraqi people to restore normal life. It should invite the UN and other nations to help in rebuilding this nation, and help its people elect their independent, sovereign government. The U.S. Army's Corps of Engineers could do a lot to repair and improve the Iraqi infrastructure, in cooperation with Iraqi engineers. This could be done in parallel with reviving the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The Iraqi people would forgive and forget, and look forward to establishing a lasting friendship with the people of the United States. But, as American statesman Lyndon LaRouche has emphasized, the U.S. Administration and President Bush would only be able to accomplish such an optimistic and good objective, if it cleans its ranks of the fascist neo-conservative gangsters who started this war as part of a wider plan of "perpetual imperial wars."

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