

Iraqi Elections Planned Amid Danger of Civil War

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Will elections be held in Iraq, as scheduled, on Jan. 30, 2005? Doubts have been cast on this schedule, which the U.S. Administration and the puppet interim Iraqi government have been frantically pushing, and for good reason: The ongoing, escalating guerrilla warfare against the occupation forces, has created what is euphemistically referred to as a “security situation,” under which nationwide polls cannot be held.

Several scenarios have been discussed, including a proposal by the current interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi, to stagger the election over weeks in some “troubled” areas. But, unless bona fide elections are held throughout the country, allowing all registered voters to participate, all official results will be considered illegitimate. At the same time, powerful and important political forces inside the country, like the broad Shi’ite coalition supported by Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein al-Sistani, have insisted that only through national elections, can a legitimate governing body be brought into being with the authority and the courage to demand an end to the illegal occupation.

An American private security specialist recently back from Iraq, has described the actual “security situation” as “worse than Vietnam.” This source, who has had combat experience in Vietnam, Panama, and in other U.S. adventures over decades, explained that in Vietnam, there was a chance of figuring out who the enemy was. In Iraq, he said, 50% of the Iraqis who are apparently working for the government are, in fact, working with the resistance.

As an indication of this, he cited the almost daily attacks, including suicide bombers, occurring near or inside the “green zone,” the area in Baghdad where the interim government and the occupying powers have their headquarters. “This is a zone which is supposed to have a secured perimeter,” he said. “The only way that the insurgents are able to attack, is if they have

someone at a very high level in the security organization that secures the zone. They obviously have inside information about when and where the patrols take place; this is information that changes every day, yet they know the schedule.”

Only a fraction of the military conflict that occurs in Iraq is reported in the media, the source noted. Yet, even massaged media reports show that now, “two U.S. Marines a day” are being killed, and nine times that number are being wounded. The case of Fallujah, the center of the resistance in the so-called “Sunni triangle,” is emblematic. According to a former Russian military intelligence officer, the resistance still controls 70% of the city, which has been obliterated by U.S. aerial bombings and ground combat over the past month. He spoke of a sophisticated underground tunnel and bunker structure, through which the resistance fighters move. In Baghdad, a German military expert said, the occupying powers cannot even control the road to the airport.

This stark reality of an escalating insurgency is gaining the upper hand, and has prompted sundry political figures to put the election date in doubt. Calls for postponing the elections, until they can be properly organized, have come from United Nations special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, as well as from leading Iraqi Sunni politicians. The most influential Sunni political organization, the Association of Muslim Scholars, which represents 3,000 mosques, has called for a boycott of the elections, on grounds that the Sunni population, in Fallujah and elsewhere, would be disenfranchised.

Furthermore, the Association stresses, there can be no meaningful elections while the U.S. military continues to bomb and kill Iraqis. Adnan Pachachi, a relatively well-respected Iraqi politician, who had served in the Iraqi Governing Council, has called for a postponement. Russian President Vladimir Putin bluntly told visiting Prime Minister Allawi,



U.S. soldiers in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, Dec. 6, 2004, conduct house-to-house searches after a car bombing. The U.S. occupation has created conditions that make a legitimate election doubtful, and without a representative election, the country could descend into chaos and civil war. Is this what the U.S. neo-cons want?

that he did not believe that the elections could be held, or could be considered legitimate, given the fact that the “occupation” was continuing.

Sunni leaders who protest that the majority of Sunnis would be left out, are not exaggerating. Again, Fallujah is emblematic: On Dec. 10, BBC issued a grizzly report on the conditions in the ravaged city of 300,000. Citing U.S. military officials, who warned that sewage and rabid animals posed a serious health threat in the city, it said that civilians, most of whom fled before and during the assault, could not be allowed back in. “Many streets are flooded with sewage water,” Red Cross spokesman Ahmad Rawi reported to BBC. He stressed the urgency of identifying “hundreds of bodies” which had been collected and stored by occupation forces in a former potato warehouse. Dogs, which have fed on the corpses, have become disease carriers, and are being shot by occupation troops.

To imagine that the population can return, and line up at the polls to vote at the end of January is a cruel joke. Now, resistance has emerged in other Sunni cities.

Wartime Candidacies

The elections are to select 275 members of a national assembly, which will draft a constitution, and elect a President

and two Vice Presidents.

The electoral lists presented by the Dec. 15 deadline, reflect the ethnic and religious divisions that the war has created in Iraq. This process of “ethnicization,” as Germany’s leading Iraq expert Aziz Alkazaz calls it, is one of the most dangerous developments created since the war, and promoted through the occupation institutions; it has undermined the idea of a national identity, and it could fuel a process of separatism, if not civil war. In fact, while the Kurdish parties in the north have upped their bid for greater autonomy, and even threatened secession, mainly Shi’ite provinces in the south have held talks on the possibility of constituting similar “autonomous” regions.

The Sunni population is numerically a minority, but it has been the ruling layer in the country in recent history, and has been the leading force in the resistance to the occupation. One Sunni group, the Iraqi Islamic Party, has presented a list of candidates. Al-

though most of its people come from the Sunni triangle, the slate is not popular, given that the group had been part of the Iraqi Governing Council, which was considered a collaborator force.

By far the most important slate is the United Iraqi Alliance, backed by Ayatollah al-Sistani. The list has 228 candidates drawn from 22 political parties or groups, among them, the Islamic Daawa Party (a Shi’ite party representing the religious authority), the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI), and the Iraqi National Congress, of which Ahmed Chalabi is a member and candidate. The list also includes some Sunnis, Yazidis, and Shi’ite Kurds. Presenting the list to journalists in Baghdad, Ali Adib, an official of the Daawa party, said, “It contains parties and political currents, as well as independent figures of different confessions and ethnic groups, and takes into consideration the demographic and geographic balance in Iraq.” The radical cleric Moqtadar al-Sadr is not on the list, but announced that he would support it, on condition that guarantees were given, that the occupation would be ended.

In addition, the two main Kurdish parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, agreed to form a single list of candidates. There is also a Turkomen Party, and many others, among them, the Constitu-

tional Monarchy Movement, a Sunni group, which has presented a list of 275 candidates. The list is topped by Sharif Ali, a cousin of Iraq's last king (killed in the 1958 coup), and the official pretender to the throne. The slate also has Kurds and Shi'ites.

Despite the fact that most of the slates, particularly the larger ones, include candidates from minority religious or ethnic groups, it is clear from the overall composition of the lists that they have been composed primarily along ethnic-religious lines, further dividing the country.

But even if slates have been presented, there is no guarantee that elections can take place. The United Nations, which is supposed to provide the personnel to prepare them, has reportedly no more than 25 representatives in the country, and cannot send more unless their safety be guaranteed. Were polls to be prepared and ballots distributed, the question remains: Could such elections be considered free and fair? As Aziz Alkazaz has pointed out, given the existence of militias associated with the Kurds and the SCIRI, as well as personal militias like the one attached to Chalabi, it can be expected that the militia presence at polling places could provide the decisive "influence" for the outcome.

Afghanistan or Algeria?

The reason that the highest Shi'ite authority, Ayatollah al-Sistani, has accepted elections, even though the election procedure and laws were established under an unlawful occupation authority, is that he believes that this is the only means to form a government which can demand independence and sovereignty—that is, an end to the occupation. In fact, it was on al-Sistani's insistence that the occupying powers, then the Coalition Provisional Authority, accepted the date he set for elections. The hope that this may pave the way for ending the occupation is, ultimately, the reason that some Iraqis are supporting the elections. Even the most discredited politicians on the scene, like Chalabi or Allawi, have felt obliged to pay lip service to the demand for ending the occupation that their own masters have imposed.

If elections are held on Jan. 30, it is most likely that the predominantly Shi'ite slate backed by al-Sistani will take the lion's share of the votes, and that its leading candidates, like SCIRI head Aziz al-Hakim and Hussain al-Sharistani, a close collaborator of al-Sistani, will emerge as the country's power brokers. The question then will be, whether the occupying powers will accept this electoral result.

Jürgen Hübschen, former military attaché in the German Embassy in Baghdad, commented: "After the January 2005 elections, what will be decisive is whether or not the U.S. is ready and able to accept a serving—rather than its current dominating—role vis-à-vis the new Iraqi leadership, and to prepare itself for the fact that a concrete plan for the withdrawal of its troops will be the number one item on the agenda of a new Iraqi government." Hübschen's view is that the United States will be forced to do this for both political and

military reasons: U.S. forces are totally overstretched, and are losing the war. The main U.S. concern, he believes, is to consolidate the five or six military bases it has set up in Iraq, for geostrategic purposes, related to developments in Central Asia and Southwest Asia.

Hübschen told *EIR* that he believes that Ayatollah al-Sistani, as the éminence grise behind the new government, would accept a gradual withdrawal of troops over time, but would insist that a substantial number—say, 50,000 troops—be removed at the onset. Most important, from al-Sistani's standpoint, is that whatever the process of U.S. withdrawal, it must be fixed and carved in stone; that is, regulated by treaty agreement. Furthermore, Hübschen said, for any government to become truly sovereign, it will be mandatory that it separate itself physically and visibly, from any entity associated with the U.S. and other occupying powers.

If the United States were to reject an electoral outcome that placed al-Sistani and his followers in the forefront, the result, in Hübschen's view, would be comparable to the situation in Algeria, after the electoral victory of the Islamist FIS (Front Islamique du Salut): "With approval of the West, a military junta prevented the establishment of a government" and "the election manipulation led Algeria into a seven-year civil war, that left more than 100,000 dead. For Iraq, the Jan. 30, 2005, elections and their fair translation into political power will be the last chance to prevent a comparable civil war, and prevent descent into final chaos."

If the United States, on the other hand, continues on its current flight forward course, and attempts to maintain its status as an occupying power, as it is doing in Afghanistan, the resistance will expand. In fact, even if the more rational option were pursued, it cannot be excluded that the guerrilla warfare will escalate. An ominous sign of a worst case scenario appeared on Dec. 15, when a bomb attack in the holy city of Kerbala killed 8 people and wounded 32, among them Sheikh Abdelmahdi al-Karbalai, a trusted associate of Ayatollah al-Sistani.

And if the elected political force does not chart a course of reconciliation, making it thinkable for Sunni political and military forces to be reintegrated into a national political process, then the result will be civil war. Any such reconciliation process must be based on the immediate reversal of the de-Baathification policy implemented by U.S. administrator Paul Bremer, which led to the disbanding of the Iraqi military, security, and civil service organizations. Even interim President Ghazi al-Yawer, after his visit to Washington in early December, blasted the de-Baathification process: "Definitely dissolving the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior was a big mistake at that time," al-Yawer told the BBC.

The Broader Picture

No perspective for stabilization could stand a chance of success, unless the internal political process were bounded

by a regional security arrangement, as proposed by Lyndon LaRouche in his April 2004 “LaRouche Doctrine.” An arrangement for regional security, bolstered by regional economic cooperation agreements, must be established among Iraq’s neighbors, whereby Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Egypt would play the leading roles. To be effective, such an arrangement would have to be supported by the U.S. Administration.

This brings up the sticky question of U.S. policy towards these keystone nations, particularly Iran and Syria, which are currently high on the hit list of the neo-conservative Bush-Cheney junta. Any hope for stability in Iraq must bring Iran into the equation, for geographic, economic, political, religious, and cultural reasons. Iran’s political leadership has made clear its readiness to contribute to a stabilization process, on condition that the U.S. stance radically change, from confrontation to dialogue.

Instead, the U.S. neo-conservatives have issued escalating accusations against Iran, mainly that the Islamic Republic has been fuelling the armed Iraqi resistance, with men, arms, and funds. Recently a new charge has been launched: that Iran has infiltrated up to 1 million Iranians into Iraq, in order to “buy up” political influence through the elections. Informed sources point out that, during Saddam Hussein’s reign, about 1 million Iraqi Shi’ites, whose ancestors had immigrated from Iran generations earlier, were expelled, and sent back to Iran. It is these layers who have been returning to Iraq.

A further charge alleges that Iran has been sending political forces to Iraq, in order to steer the post-election majority in the direction of an Islamic republic, on the Iranian model. This curious accusation appears to ignore the well-known fact that Ayatollah al-Sistani rejects the Iranian model.

Some more rational voices in the U.S. political landscape—from the circles around the Council on Foreign Relations, as well as from Brent Scowcroft, and others—have begun to float the idea that a shift towards a more amicable Iran policy, could be a rational choice. The recent success of the European Union’s “trio”—Great Britain, France, and Germany—in reaching a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear energy issues, has prompted some in Washington to moot the possibility of endorsing such a political, rather than military, approach.

As for official Washington policy towards Iraq, one can only register the signs of continuing insanity on the part of the current occupant of the White House, whom LaRouche has characterized as someone “playing God.” On Dec. 14, President George W. Bush conferred the Presidential medal of freedom, the highest U.S. civilian honor, on two men most responsible for the catastrophe in Iraq: Gen. Tommy Franks, who beat a quick exit from the disastrous war, and Paul Bremer, who headed up the Coalition Provisional Authority. Bremer was the one who introduced the de-Baathification policy which fuelled the armed resistance.