

Implications of The Iraqi Elections

by Hussein Askary

First putting things in context: The drive to impeach U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and his obscure bodyguard George W. Bush is the factor that would make Iraq, or break it. As long as Cheney remains at the wheel of the ship of the state of the United States, Iraqis would not be able to sleep quietly nor enjoy the daylight.

The fact that there has been a political process tending to “relatively” stabilize the military situation in Iraq and to get the different Iraqi factions, including the insurgents, to allow the elections to be held on Dec. 15 in a peaceful atmosphere—where everyone would be allowed to participate, and where U.S. military attacks in rebellious areas would cease—has depended on the weakening of the position of Cheney and the neo-conservative cabal in Washington in the recent months.

Interesting Anomalies

It was an interesting surprise, even to this reporter, to see the leaders of the Iraqi factions (who were on the verge of insanity in September, holding the whole country one breath away from the bloodiest civil war in the country’s history) meeting in October in Cairo to discuss national reconciliation, and bringing the insurgents (terrorists in the neo-con jargon, and freedom fighters for many Iraqis) back into the family. That meeting in late October, under the auspices of the Arab League, was the result of intensive efforts mainly by Saudi Arabia and Egypt to convince the Iraqi Sunni groups who are sympathetic to, or allied with, the insurgents fighting the U.S.-British occupation troops, to seriously consider participating in a political process to keep the country together and avoid an imminent civil war.

Reportedly, Iran, Syria, and Turkey also played a role in the effort. According to well-informed regional sources, the involvement of Saudi Arabia and Egypt (the two closest traditional U.S. allies in the region) reflected a coordination with factions inside the United States that were willing to form an organized exit strategy from Iraq, while maintaining the unity of the country and avoiding the spread of sectarian violence throughout the region. And that is definitely not Cheney’s faction.

However, it is not the intention of this report to give a rosy description of the situation in Iraq. There are certain interesting anomalies in the situation that should give rise to wondering about the dynamic of the political processes affected by the active intervention of the LaRouche movement inside the United States. However, one should not be

prevented from seeing the potential dangers lurking in every corner. It is sad, but true, to say that if Iraqi leaders of all different colors and inclinations were left on their own at this moment, they would make a miserable mess out of a potentially great nation. There is nothing in their character or ideology today, which would independently bring this ship safely to harbor. The horrific events during and after the U.S.-British invasion in March 2003, and the deep scars left by 30 years of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship and regional wars, have destroyed a great deal of the Iraqi people’s capabilities of political judgment.

This, and the factor of Cheney’s continued enthrone-ment, would hang like Damocles’ sword over Iraq and the whole region. There are increasing concerns among the governments of South West Asia that the Bush-Cheney Administration is preparing a military strike, either surgical or overwhelming, against Syria, Iran, or both to cause the destabilization of the whole region, and to give Bush and Cheney a reason to continue their drive to run the United States dictatorially in a state of permanent wars.

Now back to the Dec. 15 elections. The elections were held in an unusually calm atmosphere, where assassinations and military attacks had subsided. Insurgent groups declared that they would stop their activities to allow the elections to be held. Unlike the previous elections in February when the insurgents threatened to attack polling stations, and Sunni groups boycotted the elections, this time the Sunni participation was overwhelming. The preliminary results of the general parliamentary elections in Iraq indicated beyond any doubt how the country has been divided along ethnic and sectarian lines. The uncertified partial results released by the Iraqi Independent Elections Commission on Dec. 20 show the division of the country among four main groups: the Shia Arabs in the south and in the capital Baghdad, the Sunni Arabs in the northwest, the Kurds in the north and northeast, and a secular nationalist group headed by Ayad Allawi, former Prime Minister under the occupation, which is concentrated in Baghdad and some southern cities.

Typical are the results from, for example, Missan Province in the south: The United Iraqi Coalition (alliance of Shia religious groups) 86.8%, other minor Shia parties 5%, the National Iraqi List (secular nationalist-Allawi) 4.33%. Another example, Anbar in the west: Iraqi Accord Front (Sunni religious) 74%, National Iraqi Dialog Front (Sunni religious-nationalist) 18%, National Iraqi List (secular-nationalist-Al-lawi) 3%. In the Kurdish region, Erbil: The Kurdistan Assembly (coalition of PUK and PDK secular Kurdish separatist parties) 87.1%, Islamic Movement in Kurdish (Kurdish religious) 10.8%, other minor Kurdish groups 2%.

The only contested province is the capital, Baghdad, which has the largest number of voters among all Iraqi provinces: 2,445,000. According to the Election Commission, the Shia United Iraqi Coalition scored 58%, the Sunni Iraqi Accord Front 18.9%, the National Iraqi List 13.8%, and the Kurdish coalition 1.6%. Upon announcement of the results in



U.S. Marine Corps/Lance Cpl. Shane S. Keller 2nd

The relatively peaceful balloting in the Dec. 15 Iraqi elections indicates that it may be possible to prevent civil war, but only if the Dick Cheney apparatus, which brought war to the country, is finally gotten rid of. Here, voting in Rawah, Iraq.

Baghdad, wide-ranging protests took place there and in other cities, demanding an investigation of massive fraud and irregularities. The Election Commission was forced to declare on Dec. 28 that it would nullify the results in various polling locals in Baghdad and five other provinces.

In the meantime, threats and counter-threats have continued to be pronounced by the different political groupings, but mostly from the Sunni parties. They regard the results, in Baghdad especially, as a conspiracy to keep them out of power, in spite of the fact that they agreed to participate in elections under the military occupation of a foreign force, something they had previously refused.

Allawi's party also protested strongly. On Dec. 26, more than 10,000 people, some carrying photos of Allawi, marched through the streets of Baghdad to protest the election results, and call for the establishment of a government that would give more power to Sunni Arabs and secular Shiites. The demonstrators chanted "No Sunnis, no Shiites, yes for national unity." This sense of national unity is also mixed with distrust among the different groups. The Shiites would rather have a coalition with the Kurds, than with the Sunnis, whom they regard as old supporters of Saddam Hussein's regime, which was torturing and killing its Shia opponents. Ironically, the current, Shia-dominated government, has been recently exposed as having secret prisons, where Sunni opponents were being tortured and interrogated with methods similar to those of Saddam Hussein's security apparatus.

The Kurds, on the other hand, are worried about the possibility of the emergence of an Arab alliance of Shias and Sunnis, which would undermine their position as a power-broker and the position of the Kurdish region as a semi-independent state. Allawi's grouping of secular forces is concerned with the fact that the country is being taken over by religious funda-

mentalist groups, whether Sunni or Shia.

The results show this other aspect of the horrendous situation, where, with the help of the Bush-Cheney Administration and the Blair government, Iraq is being delivered on a platter to religious fundamentalist groups whose objective is to turn the country into a theocratic system. This embarrassment is probably the reason behind U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's heavy involvement in the negotiations on the forming of the coming government. Although the results are not yet conclusive, it is clear that the Shia group will not have an absolute majority in the Iraqi parliament to form a government by itself. Therefore, a Byzantine form of negotiations is going on among the Shia, Kurds, Sunnis, and secular groups. Obviously the remaining results of the elections will not be determined by counting, but by negotiations.

As late as Dec. 28, leaders of the Shiite and Kurdish blocs, meeting in the Kurdish city of Sulaimanya, revealed that they are going ahead with efforts to bring Sunni and other parties into a coalition government. The negotiations are conducted by the Kurdish leaders Talabani and Barzani, together with Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the leading group Shiite Coalition. Allawi and representatives of Sunni groups are also expected to arrive in Sulaimanya. "We agreed on the principle of forming a government involving all the parties with a wide popular base," the Kurdish regional leader, Masoud Barzani, said after talks with Hakim.

Divisions Persist

There are discussions taking place elsewhere in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Iran on the nature of the emerging government. This means that the coming government will be simply a nice cover for the actual division

of the country. It will not be capable of resolving major issues, such as changing the disputed draft of the permanent constitution of the nation, or negotiating an exit strategy with the United States and Britain if that possibility emerges.

One major aspect of the Iraqi tragedy, the economy, will definitely not be improved. The last two governments since the invasion have shown no intention or knowledge of how to improve or rebuild the collapsing Iraqi economy. Living conditions continue to deteriorate. Just a few days after the elections of Dec. 15, the government issued another insane economic policy, removing the subsidies on fuel prices. This meant an immediate eight-fold increase of the price of all kinds of fuels. The Iraqi population has depended heavily on subsidized fuel, food, and health-care for many years, because of the war conditions which existed since the 1980s. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, the Iraqi government is removing that protection from the economically devastated Iraqis. This shows that this government and the coming government will not act in the interest of the general welfare of the Iraqi people.

Therefore, Iraq's internal political-economic situation will not improve until the overall U.S. policy changes, and new legitimate elections are held whereby a totally new draft of a republican constitution is composed.

But Chalabi's gone

One good note is worth mentioning. It is a good sign for the forces of good, and a bad omen for Cheney's cabal. Ahmad Chalabi, Cheney's favorite pet Iraqi, and provider of much of the falsified intelligence to justify the war on Iraq, was totally smashed in these elections. As late as November, while Chalabi was on a visit to Washington to meet with his masters, he was being touted as the number one candidate to assume the position of next Iraqi Prime Minister. Iraqi voters did not give Chalabi even 1% to allow his party National Iraqi Conference a single seat in the parliament. He got 0.36% (8,645 votes out of 2.5 million) in Baghdad, 0.34% in Basra, and 113 votes in Anbar province.

His election slogan had been, "We Liberated Iraq." In the words of one political expert, it appears now that the Iraqis are liberating themselves from Chalabi.

But because of all his pre-war intelligence manipulations and dealing with the Iraqi groups who are now in power in Iraq, Chalabi remains a dangerous man. He keeps the books on most of the communication between the U.S.-British intelligence and the different Iraqi groups. His ties to the neo-cons and Cheney, and probably to Israeli intelligence would keep the Iraqis in tension.

But, unless the Iraqis are liberated from Chalabi's master, Dick Cheney, things will continue to remain in suspension. The world for the Iraqi nation, and the rest of the human race, would be a happier place once Cheney and his cabal were kept away from power, either behind bars or in some potato farm somewhere a long way from Washington.