

Iraq's Election: Was It Fish, or Fowl?

by Hussein Askary

Two weeks before Iraq's Jan. 30 elections for a national assembly, my sister-in-law and two nieces, ages 4 and 6, were sitting in a bus in Baghdad when an American convoy drove by. All cars had to move to the right, to clear the way. The bus driver, not noticing the last Humvee in the convoy, moved to the left lane, cutting off the last vehicle. A hail of bullets penetrated the bus from the front, killing the driver and the two passengers in the front row and wounding all in the second row. My sister-in-law survived with a wound on her face from glass splinters. Her two daughters also survived, because they were small and sitting low in their seats.

Ten days before the election, which was the period of Eid, the Muslim year's most important feast, this family, like most families in Baghdad and other cities, had no water, no electricity, no adequate health care, no security, and no jobs. That, after almost two years of the Anglo-American occupation of the country! The irony is that my brother was enthusiastically planning to vote in the elections on Jan. 30.

Different Iraqis have different reasons for voting in or boycotting the election, and most of them are sound and reasonable, as long as you are swimming inside the Iraqi fishbowl and can't see what is going on outside it. The majority, especially supporters of the political-religious parties allied under the 196 slate, voted in large numbers in south and central Iraq, with the belief that this would lead to the creation of a sovereign government and the end of the American-British occupation. This is what Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the supreme Shi'a religious authority in Iraq, placed all his authority and credibility on.

Another by-product of the elections, according to the Shi'a majority, although not admitted explicitly, is that they will finally have control of the government in Iraq, after many decades of Sunni control. The Kurds voted massively, but with an explicitly implicit agenda, as it were: that of creating an independent or semi-independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. The officials in the Kurdish region even set up mock referendum ballot boxes, where a majority voted for Kurdish independence. The Shi'a and Sunni groups with a secular tendency, who support Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's slate, believe that his government, with heavy political and military support from the Bush Administration, is better than the unknown.

The majority of Sunnis who boycotted the elections in the provinces in the west and northwest, where the participation was 0-10%, had strong reasons for doing that. They believe these elections will rubberstamp and legalize the criminal policies practiced against them by the occupation forces in the last two years. These are policies which turned Fallujah into ruins, and set the country on a course of sectarian and ethnic strife.

That is the view from inside the Iraqi fishbowl. There are others inside the fishbowl who have completely lost their brains, such as the new Mayor of Baghdad, Ali Fadel, who told the *New York Post*: "We will build a statue for Bush. He is the symbol of freedom." Fadel became Mayor after his predecessor was assassinated on Jan. 4, accused of pro-American loyalties. "We are especially grateful to the soldiers of the U.S.A. for freeing our country of tyranny," said Fadel, who travels around Baghdad in a \$150,000 armored SUV.

"Freedom from tyranny" à la George W. Bush, there is much of in Iraq—but there is no water, no electricity, no health care, and above all, no security.

Voter Suppression Not Only in Ohio

Following Election Day, many groups filed complaints about irregularities and clear voter suppression. This was most apparent in Kirkuk, the oil-rich multi-ethnic city in northern Iraq, which the Kurds claim as a purely Kurdish city. Turkmen and Assyrian-Chaldean Christian groups filed complaints with the Independent Election Commission, accusing Kurdish officials in the city of a pattern of preventing Turkmen and Assyrians from voting.

For example, in one polling station, Kurdish officials confiscated the ballots from three voting centers, moving them to an unknown location. Kurds with no accreditation were "guiding" the voting process for many voters inside the voting centers. In another, more critical case, thousands of Assyrian and Turkmen voters never had the chance to vote, because polls were never opened in their areas. The Kurdish groups particularly targeted the Turkmen in Kirkuk, because they constitute the second largest ethnic group in the city. The Turkmen and Arabs there anticipate a wave of attacks from Kurdish militiamen, leading to ethnic cleansing after the elections.

This has prompted the Turkish government to issue a very strong statement threatening to intervene militarily if necessary, to defend Turkey's "kinsmen" inside Iraq.

The Reality

Looking from outside the fishbowl, many Iraqis realize that these elections were held under circumstances that mean they have no legitimacy. The scenes of optimism and enthusiasm broadcast on the day of election around the world were an act of desperation by a great number of Iraqis, who want to be relieved from the current nightmare by any means. The reality, however, is that change in Iraq will be decided in

Washington. A change in U.S. policy away from perpetual wars and fascism to cooperation among a community of sovereign nations for economic prosperity and progress, is the last hope for Iraq and much of Southwest Asia and the world.

There are many dangers surrounding these elections, both for Iraq and for the region. The deepening of sectarian and ethnic divisions could be one of the immediate results. The policy of the Bush Administration has been directed towards this end. This was done by demolishing the institutions of the Iraqi nation-state: the military, security, economic, and administrative institutions. It was aggravated by subjecting one religious group to a massive military onslaught, humiliation, and torture. The destruction of the sovereign nation-state and carving up of all the Mideast nations into mini-states along ethnic, sectarian, and tribal lines (in order for the employers of Dick Cheney's controller George Shultz to grab the raw materials of the region) has been and is the policy of the neo-conservatives in the Bush Administration. This can only be stopped by an alliance of patriotic American forces, such as Lyndon LaRouche is proposing and doing, to reclaim the United States as a constitutional free republic.

Another aspect of the dangers posed by this division of the country is the continuation and aggravation of the insurgency in Iraq. This might leave the U.S. occupation forces two choices: increasing combat operations with too few, and exhausted, troops, or withdrawing from the towns and cities, leaving a new Iraqi government to use its Iraqi troops to do the awful job of fighting the insurgency in the so-called Sunni triangle. These Iraqi forces are made up mainly of Kurdish and Shi'a Iraqis, and such fighting would mean civil war. This in turn might force the U.S. troops out again to fight the insurgents themselves, Vietnam-style.

An interesting insight was added to the international upbeat reactions to the election, by the writer Sami Ramadan in an op-ed in Britain's *Guardian*. Ramadan recalls that "on Sept. 4, 1967, the *New York Times* published an upbeat story on presidential elections held by the South Vietnamese puppet regime at the height of the Vietnam war. Under the heading 'U.S. encouraged by Vietnam vote: Officials cite 83% turnout despite Vietcong terror,' the paper reported that the Americans had been 'surprised and heartened' by the size of the turnout 'despite a Vietcong terrorist campaign to disrupt the voting.' A successful election, it went on, 'has long been seen as the keystone in President Johnson's policy of encouraging the growth of constitutional processes in South Vietnam.' The



Iraqi Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi casts his ballot on Jan. 30 in Baghdad. Most Iraqis who voted, are hoping for stability and an end to the occupation. The crucial decisions are not really being made in Iraq, however, but in Washington.

echoes of this weekend's propaganda about Iraq's elections are so close as to be uncanny."

On a positive note, it seems that the Iraqi insurgents did not carry out any major terror campaign, in spite of the suicide attacks on several voting centers by alleged followers of al-Qaeda's Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi is regarded by many Iraqis as a strange and murky un-Iraqi phenomenon, created to undermine the credibility and honor of the patriotic Iraqi resistance.

A Washington source reported to *EIR* that the Iraqi elections were not seriously marred by violence because the Iraqi insurgents chose not to carry out a full-scale destabilization. The only incidents were linked to the Zarqawi group, which is hated by the legitimate Iraqi nationalist resistance, the source reported. In fact, according to the source, a leading figure in the Zarqawi group, named al-Kurdy, was killed by the Iraqi resistance for engaging in targeted attacks on Shi'ites.

In mid-December, the Iraqi resistance informed the U.S. military, through cut-outs, that for Election Day, there would be a 48-hour unilateral ceasefire, which came off on schedule. The incident demonstrated the high degree of coordination and nationwide discipline of the resistance, the source explained. The most significant attacks on the eve of the elections, which were overshadowed by the election euphoria, were of extremely symbolic nature. First the U.S. Embassy, occupying Saddam Hussein's most fortified palaces, was rocked by a mortar attack, killing two and injuring a number of U.S. diplomats and guards. On the day of the election, a British AC 130 cargo airplane crashed north of Baghdad, resulting in the death of 16 British soldiers, the

highest one-day death toll on the British troops since the invasion in March 2003. Insurgents webcast a video showing the debris of a burning airplane and claimed the attack.

A similar assessment was provided by Indian intelligence sources, who reported that there is widespread agreement among Sunnis and Shi'ites, that there is no prospect of national reconciliation and unity, while the U.S. occupation remains. Thus, the fact that the elections came off without massive disruption is not necessarily "good news" for the Bush crowd, as it could hasten the move to get the American forces out.

Surprises are possible, if Iraqi patriotism overcomes the current differences, so that the U.S.-British occupation would face a joining Shi'a-Sunni insurgency. For thousands of years, different ethnic and religious groups have lived together in what is now Iraq, including Christians who played a key role in the Islamic Renaissance during the Abbasid Caliphate.

What Is Coming Next?

There are already calls for national reconciliation and dialogue throughout Iraq. Even members of the puppet government have been forced to pronounce their willingness to help convene a conference of national reconciliation. There also promises of allowing Sunni political figures to be part of the coming government, although they boycotted the elections.

Two days after the elections, on Feb. 2, the Association of Muslim Scholars, the highest Sunni religious authority in Iraq, issued a statement saying the election "lacks legitimacy because a large portion of these people who represent many spectra have boycotted it." As a result, the group, which had given out a call to boycott the election, pointed out that the new leadership lacked a mandate to draft a new constitution and should be considered a temporary administration.

This statement nonetheless moderated the position of the Association by saying it "respects the choice of those who did vote, and will regard the coming government (if established through agreement among the parties that participated in the election process) as only a caretaker government with limited authority." This was interpreted by well-informed Iraqi experts as a signal that the Association will be open to cooperating with a patriotic, elected Iraqi government until new elections are held. This would help in minimizing the tension among the Iraqis themselves. The Association's leadership had met with U.S. officials in Baghdad and suggested it would participate in the elections if the U.S. Administration outlined a definite timeline for withdrawal from Iraq. (This, Bush said he will not do.)

Meanwhile, leaders of the Iraqi Provisional government, which included President Ghazi al-Yawar, Sunni elder politician Adnan Pachachi, and Finance Minister Adel Abdul Mandi, agreed to pursue the participation of all political, ethnic, and religious groups in the new government. President

Ghazi al-Yawar has urged political groupings not tainted by violence to take part in the formation of a new Iraqi government and constitution as soon the electoral result were made public.

After the results are announced, the newly elected Iraqi National Congress will convene. Its first mission is the selection of a Presidential Council, composed of a President of the republic and two Vice Presidents. That composition would likely be the same as the current one, with a Sunni President and one Shi'a and one Kurdish Vice President. The President would then appoint a prime minister who, in his turn, would select a ministerial Cabinet (government).

The second, and thornier, mission of the National Congress is to supervise the drafting of a permanent constitution for the republic of Iraq. An existing 1958 constitution was already available, but the U.S. Administrator of occupation, Paul Bremer, nullified it. He authorized the drafting of a new Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), which turned Iraq from a unified republic into a "federation" of different provinces.

The danger is that the Kurds are adamantly demanding that the TAL become the basis for the constitution. There are several crucial elements in the TAL that appeal to the Kurds' ambitions of independence. The first is the federation, giving the Kurds control over their geographic territories in the north. The second is the point which says that any three neighboring provinces of Iraq's 18 provinces have the right to join forces to veto any new laws they don't approve of, in a proposed constitution. This chaotic "principle" has the potential of making the drafting of the Iraqi constitution an impossible mission.

The first draft of the constitution would be approved by the Iraqi people through a referendum to be held in October. If it wins approval, it would be ratified by the National Congress as the permanent Constitution. New elections then would be held in December 2005 to elect a new National Congress and a new government to replace the provisional government and congress.

If the Iraqis were left to decide their own future, with support from the international community, their historic background and character would enable them to find ways to keep the nation united and start the process of rebuilding. But they now exist in a world facing the prospect of a New Dark Age of perpetual religious wars on a global scale. There are solutions to the crisis in Iraq and Southwest Asia in general. The best has been outlined in the publication by LaRouche, "Southwest Asia: The LaRouche Doctrine" (see *EIR*, April 30, 2004) and other writings, as a basis of a world-wide dialogue among civilizations based on long-term economic development cooperation. However, this requires putting the brakes on the Bush Administration's current criminal policies, and bringing the potentials of the United States to bear in bringing peace and development around the world. Let's do that together, and now!