

Time-Bomb of Civil War Is Ticking in Iraq

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Time is running out for the Bush Administration in Iraq, but not in the way some of its leading lights think. It is not the June 30 deadline, set by U.S. proconsul Paul Bremer and the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), for a cosmetic “transfer of sovereignty”; nor is it the November elections in the United States, which count. Rather, it is the steadily deteriorating military situation for the U.S. occupying power, facing an expanding resistance which it is incapable of containing, much less defeating. Unless a wholesale shift in policy is effected, now, toward the effective entry of the United Nations, and a UN-coordinated process of electing a constituent assembly and government, the danger is of civil war and subsequent break-up of the country.

It is no accident that Henry Kissinger, the ideologue of geopolitical manipulation and Hobbesian “diplomacy,” raised precisely this possibility in an opinion piece in the German *Welt am Sonntag*, on Feb. 15. Kissinger projected a scenario whereby a pseudo-government would be created, but not accepted, thus triggering greater strife, which could ultimately lead to partition.

Kissinger wrote that on June 30, “the formal end of the occupation changes the nature of the American engagement, but not its necessity. It requires a new strategy, to transform power into legality, and therefore requires a new dimension of diplomacy.” Specifically, he wrote, “A sovereign Iraq, which agrees to having the coalition forces remain, so that they won’t be seen as occupying forces, requires a government which is representative, secure, and internationally recognized.” Although the United States would like to introduce a system of “checks and balances,” he said, that is not part of Iraq’s tradition. Instead, ethnic, religious, and tribal groups will probably seek to defend their interests against others’, and this means that after June 30, “the security situation in Iraq could at least for a time get worse, because the various dissatisfied groups would attack the government.” Dismissing the position of France and Germany “for a rapid transfer of sovereignty under the aegis of the UN,” as something which “has been overridden by events,” Kissinger stated categorically, “The U.S. government will not bring the UN in.”

Instead, he proposed that the “international community” be brought in after July 1, in two phases: first the NATO contact group, to set up a presence, then a group under UN leadership. “Such an arrangement gains in meaning, as soon

as one has to face the ultimate challenge: for, Iraq, which, like Yugoslavia, had been created for geostrategic reasons, cannot be held together by representative institutions which desire an autocratic regime or which break up into groups.” He continued with this important point: “Even though it would not correspond at all to the desired results, still events *could make the partition in three states necessary*. But that would require a strong international leadership. This does not mean renouncing a U.S. policy of multilateral consensus, but rather its shaping under a strong leadership.”

Elections: When and How

In direct opposition to Kissinger’s geopolitical fantasies of a new empire, there are forces inside Iraq and in the UN who are exploring the possibilities for an effective, genuine transfer of sovereignty, to a democratically elected government. On Feb. 12, a UN delegation led by special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi met with the highest Shi’ite authority, Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, in Najaf, Iraq. The issue of the talks was elections: Although Bremer and the IGC had agreed in November to “transfer sovereignty” to a body selected through regional caucuses, al-Sistani made known his rejection of the plan, demanding, instead, that free and fair elections be organized, and insisting that they could be organized within the time constraints given. Although Bremer attempted to contact al-Sistani, to argue the case that elections could not be held so soon, the Shi’ite leader refused to meet him—the representative of the illegal, occupying power—and proposed contact with the UN instead, as the only body, according to international law, which could reintroduce legality into the situation. Al-Sistani initiated contact with the UN, through a leading Shi’ite member of the IGC, and invited UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to send a delegation.

Following the talks, Brahimi told reporters that al-Sistani “is sticking to his position, and we share his opinion totally, because elections are the only way to bring Iraq out of the tunnel. We are also in agreement with him that they must be well prepared to obtain the results called for by himself and the Iraqi people.” “The elections must be held at the best time possible to yield the result we hope for,” he added, without giving a timeframe. “Ayatollah al-Sistani is completely within his rights to demand the holding of elections and we are completely in agreement with him because it is the right way to resolve the Iraqi problem,” Brahimi said.

In a press conference, Brahimi detailed the reasons why organizing elections would be difficult, including technical factors: If rationing cards were to be used, as suggested, this would not satisfy all conditions, since many Iraqis do not have them, while others have forged cards. This would provide no protection against fraud. In addition, he pointed out that one has to decide what kind of government system one is electing. In current circumstances, it would not be possible to organize perfect elections, he said, but rather “reasonably credible”

elections, whose outcome could presumably be acceptable.

As for the transfer of sovereignty, slated for June 30, Brahimi said there is no agreement, to whom it should be transferred. Some members of the IGC would like to propose themselves, in perhaps an enlarged form, as the “transitional” sovereign body. Whatever it might be, it would be a “transitional authority” with a “short-lived” mandate. It would not have much power.

The strongest, and most emotionally charged answer Brahimi gave, was in response to a question about the danger of civil war. He stressed that a civil war does not start because someone decides to start it. It breaks out when one group or groups see their interests as opposed to those of the nation. He issued an appeal to all Iraqis, of all groups, to be extremely cautious. He cited Lebanon and Algeria as countries where no one dreamed civil war could break out, but yet it did.

Brahimi delivered his report to the UN, on return to New York, where the matter now rests. It is up to Kofi Annan to present a creative proposal, capable of untying the many difficult knots.

One most glaring problem is the feasibility of a return of the UN to Iraq. Clearly, if real elections are to be organized with any legitimacy, the UN must be involved. Yet, as the Secretary General has repeatedly stressed, and Brahimi’s group confirmed, Annan will not re-establish a presence there, unless security is guaranteed. Bremer’s Provisional Coalition Authority had promised such guarantees, but has been physically unable to protect UN personnel, as the bombing of their headquarters last Summer dramatized.

A related problem, raised by Brahimi, is that of the entity to which sovereignty is supposed to be transferred. Whether it may be an expanded IGC or another body pasted together by the occupying powers, it is not expected to be recognized by Ayatollah al-Sistani—who, as the UN mission demonstrated, *is* the leading authority in Iraq. This is perhaps what Brahimi meant, in describing the new body as “transitional” and “short-lived.” If a formula were to be found to make such an entity acceptable to al-Sistani, it would signify a compromise, whereby elections would be held, but several months later.

The Fallujah Syndrome

Time is running out. The gun battle which took place in Fallujah on Feb. 18 was a singularity in the process of the guerrilla warfare in Iraq. A group of 50 resistance fighters stormed the central police station, and freed up to 100 prisoners being held there. Simultaneously, they attacked the central headquarters of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, the same building which had been hit two days earlier, targetting (but missing) U.S. Army Gen. John Abizaid’s convoy. A gun battle ensued between the attackers, who were armed with rocket-propelled grenades, AK-47 machine guns and mortars, and the Iraqi security forces. At least 20 people were killed, mainly Iraqi police, and 30 were wounded.



U.S. Iraq proconsul Paul Bremer’s political and economic decisions have been consistently wrong; now his demand for an unelected Iraqi government to receive power by July 1, is guaranteeing a government that will be “short-lived,” and setting up civil war.

As a military expert pointed out to *EIR*, the modus operandi of the event has several noteworthy aspects: The intelligence capabilities of the attackers were excellent, evidenced by their knowledge of the movements of General Abizaid earlier, and their information on the staffing and set-up of the prison. The size of their unit, 50 men, marks an escalation compared to the typical, daily roadside bomb attacks and ambushes against convoys. The attackers were well-equipped, well-trained, and effective; it is estimated that they lost only four men.

Finally, and most telling, is the fact that the U.S. forces on the scene did not intervene. This provoked expressions of rage among the Iraqis. One policeman at the site was asked by a journalist about the U.S. Army. He answered: “Shit on the Americans, shit on them.” He had been shot in the leg, and three of his colleagues standing beside him had been shot dead, during the siege of the police station. “The American Army watched but did not help,” said Qais Jameel, another wounded policeman. “I don’t know why. Americans don’t like the people in Fallujah.”

According to the cited military expert, such an event is seen by the Iraqi policemen as a betrayal by their comrades-in-arms, and denotes either panic or total demoralization on the part of the U.S. troops. Reports of increasing suicides among the troops confirm this picture. And, the fact that the entire force currently deployed in Iraq is to be rotated out—rather than just a portion—tells the same story.

Face Reality Before It Is Too Late

There is a way out of the “Vietnam in the Desert”—Lyndon LaRouche’s image for the Iraqi quagmire. The only viable solution remains what LaRouche has proposed: The

United States must declare the intention to withdraw and to bring the UN in, not as a fig-leaf, but as a legitimate body for the task. Kofi Annan has emphasized that this requires security guarantees. Such security can, ultimately, be provided only by a re-established Iraqi military. As the leading expert on Iraq in Germany, Aziz Alkazaz of the Deutsches-Orient-Institut, told *EIR*, only the Iraqis can restore law and order. The security situation must be given over to the Iraqis, not to those currently being groomed, but to “clean elements in the Army, who are recognized by the population as Iraqi patriots, who have not sold out, and are not criminals. They could establish security and stop the crime and anarchy.”

This requires facing the painful reality, that disbanding the Iraqi military was a terrible mistake, made by occupation administrator Paul Bremer. On Feb. 18, USMC Gen. Peter Pace, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made clear that the decision to disband had not been made by the competent military officials. “I do not know the discussions that took place in theater on when or how to disband the Iraqi military,” Pace stated to the New York Council on Foreign Relations. “I did not give Paul Bremer advice.” Moreover, “That issue was not specifically addressed by the Joint Chiefs, brought to the Joint Chiefs,” he said. “We were not asked for a recommendation or for advice.”

Now that mistake must be rectified, if it can, in time. Restoring security through a sovereign Iraqi military force, is the first precondition for holding elections. In the view of Alkazaz, the security situation must thus become visibly better, as the result of the intervention of a national, patriotic Army figure, who establishes order—but does not move against different groups. There are many such well-known Iraqi military figures. The UN cannot provide this security, and if the Americans try to establish order, the conflict situation remains.

Through the establishment of order, people must be able to see a new horizon. They have to be able to perceive that the occupation will end. An agreement has to be made for an orderly U.S.-U.K. military withdrawal—not overnight, but real.

As specified in LaRouche’s proposal, the UN must oversee the electoral process leading to a constituent assembly, which would draft a constitution. The Iraqi constitution of 1958 should serve as the historical precedent and starting point. Elections could then be organized. Former Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, who is still being unlawfully imprisoned, should be released from custody, and allowed to serve in this process.

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