

Iraq: Will It Be Peace Or a New Dark Age?

by Hussein Askary

By the first week of June, it was becoming clear that, unless something is done very soon, Iraq would soon look as if the Mongol army of Hulagu was there once again. Something must happen in Washington to change the course of the insane Cheney-Rumsfeld policy, because, although Iraqis might wish to do something, they are not the absolute determining factor. With the finding of tens of beheaded and mutilated bodies, killed on the basis of sectarian identity this first week of June, the prospect of Iraq entering a dark age seemed possible. The Iraqi nation seems to have lost its immunity against a civil war, and has crossed the red line that leads there. The national elections were held on Dec. 15, 2005, but still the long-awaited Iraqi government was missing interior, defense, and national security ministers. The whole country is under the total control of religious-ethnic militias belonging to the major political parties, or under the claws of terrorist and criminal gangs. The official police and military forces are nowhere to be seen, when they are not carrying out criminal kidnappings and killings themselves, on behalf of this or that group.

Added to all that, an exhausted, desperate, and demoralized U.S. Army is committing horrific crimes against civilians. The irony is that there have been more voices raised in the U.S. than inside Iraq, demanding the protection of human life in the country and investigations of these crimes. If the Iraqis themselves and their government are not ready to fight for its citizens, then you are looking at a society that has lost its fitness to survive. The life of an Iraqi today is worth less than a gallon of gasoline. Iraqis are indifferent to the killing of other Iraqis, if they happen to be of a different sectarian or ethnic group. This indifference is the most dangerous sign of what is killing us as a nation. It is not always Iraqis that kill Iraqis, but the problem is the indifference.

Is there light at the End of This Tunnel?

However, a number of developments, specifically on June 7 and 8, slightly reversed that view. On June 7, the government of the new Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, ordered the immediate release of 2,600 Sunni men, who were imprisoned on charges of participating in the insurgency. Al-Maliki, himself a Shi'ite, took that decision as part of his promise to establish a national reconciliation process. Sunni groups welcomed this step, but emphasized that more has to be done, since there are



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about 39,000 detainees in the country being held on such charges.

Furthermore, the Advisor to the Prime Minister, Adnan al-Kadhimi, told the Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* that al-Maliki is intending to issue an initiative for national reconciliation in two steps. First, there will be the release of thousands of detainees, and then he will present two proposals during the National Reconciliation Conference to be held under the sponsorship of the Arab League in Baghdad on June 22. The first proposal will be on issuing a "general amnesty" for all detainees through the National Security Council. The second will be a proposal for comprehensive national reconciliation. Al-Kadhimi did not give further details on the latter proposal. But, Adnan al-Dulaimi, the leader of the largest Sunni block, National Accord, confirmed that his group is drafting a resolution on a law for general amnesty.

Also on June 8, Prime Minister al-Maliki, finally announced his nominees for interior, defense, and national security ministers. Al-Maliki had to fight with his allies in the Shi'ite Coalition block, in order to keep his promise of appointing ministers of a mixed ethnic-sectarian background who are not tied to any political group. The Interior Minister is Jawad al-Boulani, a Shi'ite. The Defense Minister is Abdulkader Mohammed Jasim, a Sunni. And the National Security Minister is Shirwan al-Waili, of mixed Kurdish and Shia background. The Council of Representatives (Parliament) approved the ministers after a short debate. This development puts the Prime Minister on his promised path of regaining control over the different Iraqi provinces, a mission which will not go so smoothly, since his idea is to dismantle all the militias. The first ones to oppose him are members of his own Coalition, who have control over all the cities of southern Iraq. Basrah is the most difficult part of it.

The province is not only contested by both Shia/Sunni forces and different inter-Shi'ite groups, but also it has become a playground for British-Iranian intelligence warfare. The British are using Basrah and Amara as launching pads for irregular warfare which targets the Arabic-speaking part of Iran in Al-Ahwaz. This is part of the Blair-Cheney regime-change operations against Iran, to accompany a preemptive

military strike against Iran's nuclear power sites. The Iranians, according to Iraqi sources, feel forced to defend themselves against the British operations inside Iraq, supporting anti-British groups in Basrah and Amara, either directly or indirectly.

Killing of Terrorist Leader al-Zarqawi

The same day, June 8, Prime Minister al-Maliki appeared in a special press conference in Baghdad, together with U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and U.S. Commander in Iraq, General George Casey, to announce the killing of Jordan-born terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al-Zarqawi, who allegedly led a terrorist network in Iraq on behalf of Usama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization, had vowed to instigate a civil war between the Shia and Sunni population. His group has claimed responsibility for the suicide mass killings of Iraqi civilians. Al-Maliki said Zarqawi was killed along with seven aides at about sunset on June 7, in a house 50 km northeast of Baghdad, in Baquba. "Al-Zarqawi was terminated," Mr. al-Maliki said in the press conference, drawing applause from the journalists. This event is obviously some sort of a major gift for the new Iraqi government delivered by the U.S. forces.

The fact that al-Zarqawi's announced mission in Iraq was to create a civil war, confirmed to many Iraqis that he was some sort of provocateur, working for an Israeli or some western intelligence agency. Actually, recently, Iraqi insurgents fighting against the U.S. forces, opened a new front against al-Zarqawi gangs. For example, in Falluja, the stronghold of the Sunni insurgents, the "1920 Revolution Brigades," the biggest Iraqi insurgent group, launched a fight in late May to clean out the followers of al-Zarqawi from the city.

In any case, this development, together with the initiatives for amnesty and national reconciliation, creates a new situation, where turning a new leaf would be possible internally in Iraq. However, the real difference would only be made if the U.S. changes course, and the words and ideas of Lyndon LaRouche are heeded. His idea for an exit strategy from Iraq and a strategic initiative for peace through development, which includes all the nations of the region, is still applicable. That is where the nation of Iraq could come out of the grip of a looming dark age and enter, together with the nations of Southwest Asia, into an era of peace.

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