

Iraq: National Sovereignty and Military Occupation are not Compatible

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

In a seemingly poignant analysis of the situation in Iraq, BBC news online analyst, Jim Muir assessed Iraqi politics following the choice of Jawad Al Maliki as prime minister designate.

Muir's detailed analysis failed to even hint at the possibility that the unwarranted US-British military occupation of Iraq is at all a factor in the growing sectarian divide, the insurgency and the grim future awaiting that country.

But the BBC and its analysts have been more considerate if compared to their US media counterparts. CNN behaves as if the virtual political deadlock in Iraq and the brewing civil war — or at least the growing prospects for one — are entirely the making of the Iraqis. US military is merely an honest observer, who has pushed incessantly so that Iraqis 'get their act together' and rise above sectarian quarrels.

In fact, this was the overriding conclusion throughout much of the Western media that followed Al Maliki's emergence as the confirmed candidate for the premiership post: the problem is solely Iraqi.

Ironically, in a comprehensive television report, Aljazeera seemed to have reached a similar outcome. Listing the security, political and economic challenges facing Al Maliki, the pan-Arab station failed to register foreign occupation, which dominates every aspect of Iraqi life as a challenge in its own right. It matters little whether such deductions are the outcome of poor journalism or an intentional attempt to demarcate the emerging reality in Iraq without having to acknowledge time and again that military occupation is the mother of all evils. But even if the occupation is completely relegated as nuisance, the fact of the matter is that the military occupation of Iraq is the core of the ongoing tragedy.

Indeed, Iraq, like most Middle Eastern countries was rife with problems even before American tanks rolled into Baghdad in March 2003. But much, if not all, of the country's misfortunes — at least ones that BBC, CNN and Aljazeera would find newsworthy — are either created by the occupation or are exasperated by its presence.

To pretend that the Iraqi resistance is not in fact a violent retaliation against a much more violent military invasion, is to defy reality. Of course, the US administration insists on doing exactly that: still speaking of a foreign espoused 'insurgency', engineered by the shadowy figure of a Jordanian terrorist, who seems to appear in so many different locations all at once. To address Iraq's economic ills without addressing 10 years of devastating sanctions, followed by a destructive war, invasion and a domineering military occupation, that was precisely set forth to deprive Iraq of its right over its own natural resources, is also to defy

reality. One must be badly informed to keep on believing in Washington's hopeless slogans of liberating Iraq for the Iraqis, as a model of Arab democracy and so forth, while ignoring the most obvious fact that it was Iraq's immense economic wealth and its strategic import — among other reasons — that inspired America's Mesopotamia campaign in the first place. How can an Iraqi government, led by Al Maliki or any other politician, confront Iraq's economic crisis, without having complete control — physical as well as political- over the oil fields, the country's most valuable assets and the backbone of its economy?

Moreover, to make believe that the Iraq 'breakthrough' could also translate into meaningful political sovereignty in a country under occupation is also to insist on negating basic facts. The US influence over successive Iraqi leaderships since the first days of the occupation has always translated into total control over the decision making of whichever political body placed at the helm, starting with the Iraq government council, to the interim government to whichever government that is currently being concocted.

Without real control over the country's physical space and wealth and without a serious and fully independent political role, what can any prospective Iraqi government really achieve? How can Al Maliki and his sectarian government end the 'insurgency' without ending the occupation, provide jobs without decisive control over the country's oil and make independent decisions if its political will is hostage to the US government?

So why are some Iraqis taking part in this charade any way? As devious and unconvincing as it is, many Iraqis see the current political setup as a source of hope, a starting point toward a better future for the battered country. For others, it's an expression of a sectarian triumph — or domination — of one group over the other. While many Shias find such a setup beneficial, others find it unmerited, and rightly so, this will likely undermine the secular identity of Iraq in favor of religious/cultic zealots and their fanatical, authoritarian views.

For the rest, all the political wrangling that is taking place among Iraq's political elites under US auspices in Baghdad's Green Zone is beside the point. They are bracing for many more US military sweeps, suicide bombings, sectarian violence and the rest. It's indeed a pity that the media is once again coming to rescue the Bush administration, acting as if Iraq's national resurrection can be viewed separately from the overbearing and bloody occupation of the country. It's also regrettable that even Arab media is following the suit.

The fact of the matter is that much of the country's ailments were a direct result of the illegal war and violence that followed. Only an end to the occupation can put Iraq on the right track toward national reconciliation and return to normality. As long as the US government perceives its stay in Iraq as a long one, all the complementary attributes of military occupation — violence, security chaos, sectarianism and corruption — will persist, and there is little that Al Maliki, or any other politician, can do about it.

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