Iraq's Separation Walls

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Global Research, April 23, 2007

Arablinks.blogspot.com 1 May 2007

Region: Middle East & North Africa

In-depth Report: IRAQ REPORT

Al-Hayat brings together some comments on the Great Wall of Adhamiya:

> A member of parliament for the Islamic Party said resort to this policy reinforces the tendency to sectarianism among the population, in fact this decision relies on [or sanctions] the sectarian factor in isolating the area, pointing out that "this is an index of the fact that this government has not yet grasped that while military effort is needed, it is not he solution of every problem."...
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> The official spokesman for the Sadrist trend told Al-Hayat "A policy of enclosing neighborhoods is not going to make the Baghdad security plan succeed. Adopting this approach is a result of the fact that the Iraqi military forces have voluntarily submitted to the American occupation". ...
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> A resident by the name of Ali Ibrahim said "it appears that federalism, with its desire to partition Iraq, will also include Baghdad in its partitioning. People here are talking about a decision by the government to issue special identity [cards or badges] to the residents of Sunni neighborhoods."...
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> Computer programmer Mustafa, age 25, stressed "uneasiness with the thrust behind the wall [policy] because it will turn Adhamiya into a giant prison."

The journalist balances this with explanations by government people, and a mocking comment by the Islamic State of Iraq. But the gist of the above-noted comments,

representing Sunni political opposition, Shiite political opposition and the views of residents, is that this wall isn't just a random bad idea. On the contrary, the idea here is that the wall embodies and symbolizes the fact that "Iraqi forces have submitted to the occupation"; that the Maliki government and the Americans are relying on and sanctioning the principle of sectarian separation; and that the occupation appears to be taking the partition/federalism scheme right into the heart of Baghdad. In a word: The wall embodies and symbolizes the fact that the Americans are not merely responding to violence to try and minimize it. Rather, they are implementing by force a proactive strategy that exploits the sectarian problems in the interests of partition and further weakening of the country; and the Iraqi forces are going along with that.

A lot of the "progressive" American criticism of the war is based on the contrary idea, namely that the Bush administration lacks a coherent plan, that they are buffoons, that they are already way past plan B, and absurdly up to the letter F or G. That they are continually being outwitted by the mercurial action-hero Sadr. And so on and so forth. This is the view that sees the Bush administration as the short guy in the old tall-guy/short-guy vaudeville routine, a sad story, supposedly, that will lead to inevitable defeat and withdrawal. The point here is that a discussion that stays within that framework is missing the other side of the story, namely that there really is a proactive American strategy, and that they are not really there as peacekeepers.

Let's give credit where credit is due. The building of isolation-walls around troublesome residential areas in Iraq was part of a series of war-winning ideas published over four months ago by the neo-con Nibras Kazimi, former Chalabi employee and De-Baathification implementer, now at the Hudson Institute (see his personnel blurb there), in a [December 1 2006 post] that included this:

> I propose a **'closed canton' method for Baghdad's Sunni-heavy suburbs** of Hai al-Jami'a, 'Amiriya, Jihad, Ghazaliya, Yarmouk, Dora, Khadra' and 'Adhamiya, closing each off unto itself. A similar fix should be extended to the **rural Sunni satellite towns** (the housing clusters) to the north, west and south of Baghdad: Mushahdeh, Khan Dhari, Mahmoudiya, Yusufiya, and 'Arab Jbour.
>
> This should be done using the **Israeli method**: fence them with **concrete and technology**. The Israelis have been building a separating wall between them and the Palestinians over the past two years....

Israeli separation walls for Iraq seemed a bizarre figment of the neocon imagination at the time, but now that it appears to be US policy, it's worth taking a look at the politics of this. Kazimi called for high-profile development projects to be undertaken in the walled-off areas, and also this: "...a systematic effort to match the Saddam regime's personnel archives to the current addresses of these ex-officers from the military and intelligence services should be undertaken. Most of these officers were given state-sponsored housing in the above mentioned neighborhoods during the Saddam era…" In other words, if we take Kazimi as an index of the neo-con approach, it would appear a major political aim of this walling-off strategy has to do with more-efficient hunting down of ex-Baathists, contrary to the supposed US strategy, which is to ease de-Baathification and try and negotiate with the domestic (non-AlQaeda/ISI) resistance.

So while we are being told that the US recognizes the damage caused by the initial de-Baathification excesses, and is supposedly pressing the Maliki administration to do more by way of national reconciliation, the Israeli-wall strategy points in the other direction, toward an intensified exploitation of the sectarian issue, hand in hand with an intensification and militarization of de-Baathification.

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