

U.S. Creates Its Antithesis in Iraq

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Nowhere it is more obvious than in Iraq that the existence of an election law, elections themselves and the constitution they are based on are not indicators of democracy or legitimacy, because these mechanisms are merely symbols of the antithesis of the mechanisms of democracy as practiced back home by the U.S. occupying power.

An editorial of The Washington Post on December 8 hailed the passing two days earlier of an amended version of the 2005 election law by the Iraqi “Council of Representatives” (CoR) as a “Breakthrough in Iraq,” which “gives democracy a chance to work.” However if this statement is not misleading, then it is extremely too optimistic, at least for one reason: The Iraqis themselves had another say.

The new version was vetoed by none other than Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi. On November 23, under U.S. excessive pressure including a phone call by President Barak Obama to *Kurdistan Regional Government* head *Masoud Barzani*, the CoR passed another amended version of the law without addressing al-Hashemi’s demands to increase the representation in parliament of displaced people, internally and abroad, from 5% of the total to 15%, which indicates yielding in to U.S. pressure by al-Hashemi, nor did it address the Kurds’ threat to boycott the elections if their demands in Kirkuk were not met, in another indication of yielding to U.S. pressure by the Kurds, although it did meet their complaint for more parliamentary seats.

Rachel Schneller, a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. State Department writing for the Council on Foreign Relations on December 4, warned that the latest version of the Iraqi election law could make things worse in Iraq if approved. The Sunnis, including Hashemi, could resort to “desperate measures” to gain power as the new election law provoked claims of Shiite dominance. Schneller wrote that elections in Iraq are not a sign of stability. “The United States would do well to back away from the policy of elections at any cost,” she concluded.

Obama’s administration had a different point of view. U.S. diplomats, notably Washington’s ambassador in Baghdad Christopher Hill, had pushed MPs to pass the law, which they did in the wake of a meeting between a US delegation including US Forces Commander in Iraq General Raymond Odierno and deputy US Ambassador to Baghdad Robert Ford and the Iraqi president Jalal Talibani. The White House said the move was “a decisive moment for Iraq’s democracy.” White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the U.S. welcomed the new law. “This legislative action will allow Iraq to hold national elections within Iraq’s constitutional framework,” he said. Earlier, Obama had hailed the Iraqi elections next year as a “significant breakthrough” and a “milestone ... that can bring lasting peace and unity to Iraq.” The administration sees the election as a prerequisite to the U.S. meeting its goal of releasing more combat troops for the Afghani theatre by August next year, and redeploying its

combatants fully by 2012, whatever the cost might be to Iraqis.

The carnage left by a series of coordinated attacks by car bombs and suicide bombers on December 15, December 8, October 25 and August 19, which struck at the symbols of what the U.S. hopes would be a burgeoning pro-western government, if not a puppet regime, in and near the heavily protected Green Zone, which houses the largest U.S. Embassy worldwide, the Iraqi parliament and other government offices and embassies in Baghdad, claiming more than 500 lives and hundreds of wounded, and inflicting devastating damage on public order infrastructure, is a stark and humiliating proof of the U.S. failure, and not only a failure of a proxy Iraqi government, in securing even the Iraqi capital after less than nine years of the U.S. - led invasion of Iraq.

Those bloody demonstrations of insecurity cast serious doubts on the planned imminent redeployment of U.S. troops. "The American role is necessary now in Iraq, not only to maintain security but to maintain political stability," Hameed Fadhel, a political science professor at Baghdad University told Asia Times on Dec 15. "The Iraqi people no longer trust their politicians," added Tariq Harb, a member of Prime Minister Noori al-Maliki's State of Law alliance. Sadi Pira, a politburo member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, one of the two dominant Kurdish parties, was more vocal on maintaining the U.S. "military role" in Iraq: The latest bombings in Baghdad, along with unrest in Mosul and Kirkuk, "proves that the Iraqi forces are not able to control the cities or the borders. If the U.S. position is to extend the [stay] of the remaining coalition forces, it is not bad for Iraq," Pira told the Times.

Such statements vindicate the U.S. officials who were quoted by Reuters on December 10 as saying that the 60-day period after Iraq's election will probably reveal whether the country will tip back into sectarian bloodshed or move toward stability and peace. But more importantly, the immediate aftermath of the upcoming elections would reveal whether the U.S. troops would redeploy on time. The U.S. force in Iraq is supposed to be reduced to 50,000 by the end of August from around 115,000 now. However, the date for the end of the U.S. combat operations in Iraq is not included in a bilateral security pact signed last year, but was set by Obama as part of a pledge to U.S. voters to end the war on Iraq.

In his accepting Nobel Peace Prize speech earlier this month, Obama proclaimed a justification for war that could label him more a modern Niccolo Machiaville than "the candidate of change," which does not preclude the extension of his country's military presence in Iraq as a hidden agenda. "The instruments of war do have a role to play in preserving the peace," Obama declared. The United States reserves the right to "act unilaterally if necessary" and to launch wars whose purpose "extends beyond self-defense or the defense of one nation against an aggressor," he said.

Could this be the hidden agenda of the United States in Iraq: i.e. to create pretexts for a permanent military presence in Iraq? Within this context it has been noteworthy that the government of al- Maliki and its security officials, when they were questioned by the parliament in closed and public sessions last week, were divided over whom to blame for the bombings: Syria and other "Arab" countries or infiltrators of their security agencies by resistance elements whom they dub as "terrorists," but they never hinted to the U.S. occupying power as a possible culprit, which maintains the capability to really infiltrate the security shield around the "Green Zone" and could be the major beneficiary of portraying the government as still incapable of maintaining law and order; this possibility was given substance, for example, by the report of The New York Times on December 11 that

Blackwater gunmen, ostensibly contracted as security guards in Iraq and Afghanistan, “participated in some of the CIA’s most sensitive activities—clandestine raids with agency officers,” and by CIA Director Leon Panetta’s briefing before Congressional intelligence committees last June about a covert “assassination program” involving Blackwater. Nor did they hint to Iran, the major beneficiary of the U.S. occupation or to voting by bombs by the political components of the U.S. -engineered “political process” as they used to do since they were brought into the country by the invading armies.

The reason underlying the U.S. failure in Iraq should be sought in the fact that the United States has failed to establish a political system of its own image in Iraq and has instead created its antithesis, which deprived both its presence in the country as well as the political regime it has so far failed to install there of a legitimacy that would credibly stand on its own as an alternative to the legitimate national regime the U.S. invasion devastated in 2003, notwithstanding the fact it was labeled a dictatorship by western standards of liberal parliamentary democracy.

For the same reason, the U.S. - engineered Iraqi constitution of 2005 and the election law which regulated the Iraqi elections the next year as well as the latest amended election law, which will regulate the upcoming elections early next year, have so far failed to vindicate the missing legitimacy.

Although the U.S. managed to go to its war on Iraq on seemingly “legally sufficient grounds both nationally and internationally, the problem was legitimacy”: U.S. invasion struck at the heart of the “just-war theory,” which is codified in international law, retired General Wesley K. Clark, a senior fellow at the Burkle Center for International Relations, rightly noted on July 2, 2007, indicating that the U.S. biggest mistake was the failure to appreciate the importance of law and the concept of legitimacy in the conduct of American affairs abroad, and citing “recent polls”, he said the U.S. is seen by some as “the greatest threat to peace and, in some instances, (former) President (George W.) Bush more dangerous than Osama Bin Laden!”

Indeed, given the “continuity” of Bush’s policies in Iraq, Bush’s successor is not less responsible for the current status quo in the country if he doesn’t reverse course, which incumbent President Obama did not so far. The invasion was illegitimate, the ensuing occupation is still illegitimate, the proxy regime the U.S. occupying power is still trying to install in Baghdad is illegitimate, and no artificially and hastily drafted and instituted constitution and election law could legitimize an illegitimate status quo in Iraq.

Illegitimacy of the status quo in Iraq is further questioned by the bitter and tragic inhumane fruits of the status quo. What elections as indicator of democracy could any objective observer perceive in a country where the U.S. military adventure has left around five million children orphans, one million child laborers, street vendors or beggars, and three million women widows. At least there are three million Iraqi refugees abroad; the U.N. has estimated that there were about 2 million Iraqi refugees in neighboring Jordan and Syria, and some 2.6 million people displaced within Iraq, in addition to millions of unemployed Iraqis — all constituting more than half of the 27 - million population. The state infrastructure is still not rehabilitated, the central government could not secure its own safety, let alone the safety of the population, in the capital Baghdad, let alone the rest of the country, without the presence of about 115 thousand mainly U.S. troops and around 100 thousand foreign mercenaries, dubbed as security contractors, and where the basic services like water and power are either totally broken down or partially operational, and basics like

fuel are in short supply in a country floating on the largest oil reserves in the world, second only to Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. support of undemocratic Arab regimes all throughout the twentieth century, allegedly for giving priority to alliances against communism over democratization, is held responsible for the survival of oppressive governments, the emergence of military dictatorships and delaying the normal pace of development in the Arab world.

However, following the collapse of the communist Soviet Union, the ensuing disintegration of the Warsaw Pact late in the eighties of the past century, and the emergence of the United States as the leader of a unipolar world system and the sole inheritor of the WWII victory, have all contributed to a U.S. turnabout toward improving the image of the American world leader, and within this context unfortunately the U.S. launched a war on Iraq “on the wings of a lie” (Thomas L. Friedman on November 18, 2005) that was portrayed — after all other pretexts for the war were proved pure lies, including WMD and links to al-Qaeda — by US official propaganda as a war for democracy, not only in Iraq, but also from the Iraqi launching pad all throughout the region.

Creating the antithesis of U.S. non - sectarian democracy in Iraq might serve the immediate goals of the war on the country, but absolutely it negates the U.S. self - proclaimed goal of creating a democracy there. First among the immediate goals is precluding a power vacuum if Iraq has no elected parliament and no new government in place by March 2010, because the ensuing renewal of sectarian civil war could restrict releasing more U.S. combat troops for Afghanistan. However, instituting a sectarian government that takes its legitimacy from a sectarian parliament elected on the basis of a sectarian constitution would only be the ideal political recipe for the renewal of the status quo.

Nobody cares now to hold the U.S. administration responsible for ignoring the bipartisan consensus on the “benchmarks” that were set to avoid the creation of a sectarian regime in Baghdad, and consequently to quell the sectarian war that erupted in the footsteps of the invading armies, and still fuelled by the ruling “friends” of the United States. Washington’s calls for a “timetable” to achieve the benchmarks as a precondition for U.S. military and financial support fell on deaf ears in Baghdad. Patrick Lang, former head of the Middle East section of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said the trouble is that Iraqis do not believe there will be serious consequences if they fail to achieve these benchmarks. “Realistically they can figure out that the chances we would pull the plug and leave is just about zero.” (Council on Foreign Relations, March 11, 2008) Amendment of the sectarian constitution of 2005 was among eighteen benchmarks set by the [Iraq Study Group](#), but this benchmark has yet to be met.

Ironically, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is in charge of foreign policy, has yet to step in with more than a nominal role in Iraq. Following her latest counterproductive input in Pakistan and the Arab - Israeli peace process, she seems in a frenzy to clinch the title of her post in an administration that has unequivocally shifted the management of foreign policy from the Foggy Bottom to the White House, to jostle herself the place she is entitled to among a veteran team of heavyweight old hands whom President Obama assigned the most critical foreign affairs problems in Afghanistan - Pakistan, the Middle East and Iraq to Richard Holbrooke who ended the Balkan war, George Mitchell who brought peace to Northern Ireland and Vice President Joe Biden respectively. Hardly Mrs. Clinton has so far figured out or in about Iraq. Yet, and despite her negative voting record on Iraq, she still can make a difference by at least weighing in for a speedy

withdrawal out of the country by U.S. marines and troops, to leave Iraq to Iraqis so they could find a way out of the tragic quagmire her country plunged Iraq in.

Total and complete withdrawal of the U.S. military from Iraq is the prerequisite for a free country where election laws could then be drafted on national, and not on sectarian basis, to be credibly part of a democratic evolution. Mere “redeployment” of the U.S. military there will not do the trick and will not change the status quo.

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