

WSP Start your own Business - own #1 rated Internet Business - Now in Asia!

ASIA TIMES Online
www.atimes.com

WRITE for ATol

ADVERTISE

MEDIA KIT

GET ATol BY EMAIL

ABOUT ATol

CONTACT US

Read us in Chinese at

亞洲時報 在線

Search:  Archive  ASIA TIMES by keyword

Middle East

Dec 15, 2005

THE ROVING EYE

We vote, then we throw you out

By Pepe Escobar

First, a quick look at the environment ahead of Thursday's elections in Iraq. Political assassinations, party headquarters burned, abductions (all largely unreported by Western corporate media). A former prime minister, Iyad Allawi - widely known in Baghdad as "Saddam without a moustache" - saying on the record that human rights in President George W Bush's Iraq are worse than they were under Saddam.

Current Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari's Da'wa Party accusing Allawi of defending the occupiers. Allawi accusing Jaafari's government of corruption. Former Pentagon asset Ahmad

Chalabi's campaign posters with the inscription, "We liberated Iraq."

A network of secret torture prisons and charnel houses. Fear and loathing in militia hell. American military operations to "secure peaceful voting". All traffic circulation prohibited by the occupiers (to prevent car bombings). The borders with both Syria and Jordan, as well as Baghdad's airport, all closed.

Satanic, free and fair

We all knew what some were going to say. Saddam Hussein - preparing his next coup de theater in court - declared the elections "a farce". Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, plus four other jihadi groups, denounced them as "a satanic project", vowing to perpetuate the jihad, fighting for "an Islamic state ruled by the book [the Koran] and the traditions of Prophet Mohammed".

Other positions are more nuanced. On Monday, a leaflet was widely distributed in the Azamiyah neighborhood in Baghdad stating that Sunni Arabs might have a chance to reinforce their position through the elections, but "the fighting will continue with the infidels and their followers".

The Bush administration spin - faithfully reproduced by Western corporate media quoting the usual ("US officials") suspects - follows the same wishful script: a "large turnout" among the "disaffected Sunni Arab minority" that "could" produce a government "capable of winning the trust of the Sunnis", "defusing the insurgency" and thus leading the US "and other

 Print this article

 Email this article

 Currency converter

 Comment on this article: Go to



RELATED ARTICLES

[Sunnis opt for bullets and the ballot](#)

(Dec 14, '05)

[Sectarian flaws in Iraq](#)

(Dec 13, '05)

[Badr's spreading web](#)

(Dec 10, '05)

[The daunting logistics of withdrawal](#)

(Dec 9, '05)

 Tailor-made China Tours

[China Travel](#)
[China Tours](#)
[Yangtze River Cruise](#)
[Great Wall of China](#)
[China Airline](#)
[Map of China](#)


 HotelTravel.com


[New delhi Hotels](#)
[Maldives Hotels](#)
[Sri lanka Hotels](#)
[Manila Hotels](#)
[Bali Hotels](#)
[Korea Hotels](#)

 WSP Business for Sale €49,700

 War and Terror

 The Complete Spengler

 The Complete Henry C K Liu

 The Best of Pepe Escobar

foreign troops" to start going home by 2006.

The favorite Anglo-American election candidate supposedly capable of pulling it all off is once again Allawi - a truculent secular Shi'ite who was once a Ba'athist (he has kept the good connections) before he became anti-Saddam and a US intelligence asset. The White House may forget it, but Iraqis don't; Allawi gave the go-ahead for the American leveling of Fallujah and the American bombing of holy Najaf in 2004.

A few days ago he was bombarded with shoes and chased away from the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf. British Prime Minister Tony Blair supports him and considers him "the best hope" for Iraq. Pentagon analysts agree, as one of them told The New Yorker's Seymour Hersh that "he would allow us to keep Special Forces operations inside Iraq ... mission accomplished. A coup for Bush."

But no amount of feel good stories disguise the fact that the American project is doomed to fail because the premise itself is flawed - a semblance of democracy as the offspring of an illegal invasion and foreign occupation. Moreover, this White House-promoted and/or imposed "fast food democracy" has been sectarian-based from the start. It is inexorably leading to the Lebanonization of Iraq, a phenomenon parallel to the Iraqification of the occupation.

Iraqi voters have their own reasons to question whether these elections are free and fair. For starters, most are not interested; what really glues them to TV sets is Saddam on trial (the majority of Iraqis, Shi'ites and Kurds, has already condemned him to death). There's poor security for the voters; they can only hope they won't be blown to smithereens when they take the mandatory walk to the polling station to choose between 231 political parties, coalitions and individual candidates.

And there's little security for the almost 7,000 candidates either. The bulk of the campaigning has been on TV; this means only a few flush parties stood a chance. Live campaigning led in many cases to abduction and even assassination. Moreover, most voters are not exactly sure of what they're doing. Recent polls have revealed that at least half of the Iraqi population is still not convinced of the merits of Western-style democracy, at least the White House-promoted version.

Half believe that the occupiers should have never set foot in Mesopotamia. Sixty percent think that they turned the country into an even bigger disaster than it was after the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the first Gulf war in 1991 and 12 years of United Nations sanctions. And two thirds of the population wants the occupiers out. Half the people polled by the BBC said Iraq needed a strong leader (a "Saddam without a moustache"?) And only 28% said democracy was a priority.

The full Shi'ite agenda

It takes just a little political acumen to tell which way the (desert) wind blows. By the end of November, Shi'ite firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr had made his move, coming out with all his political guns blazing to promote a "pact of honor", which he called Iraqi parties to subscribe to.

Last Thursday, in the Baghdad neighborhood of Kadhimiya, the 14-point pact was signed by an impressive array of political heavyweights. Among them: the two main Shi'ite parties, the

AMERIVEST®

a subsidiary of
Ameritrade Holding
Corporation

- > You define your goal
- > We'll design a tailored investment plan
- > All it takes is a few minutes

 **GET A FREE
PORTFOLIO
ANALYSIS
TODAY**

Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Da'wa; the Sadrists; the Iraqi Concord Front (which is a coalition of the three major Sunni Arab parties); Ahmad Chalabi (in person); members of the de-Ba'athification committee; a number of tribal chiefs; unions; social associations; and government employees.

Among the crucial points of the pact are: withdrawal of the occupiers and setting of an objective timetable for their withdrawal from Iraq; elimination of all the consequences of their presence, including any bases for them in the country, while working seriously for the building of [Iraqi] security institutions and military forces within a defined schedule; no more immunity for the occupation troops; no relations whatsoever with Israel; a condemnation of terrorism ("We condemn terrorism and acts of violence, killing, abducting and expulsion aimed at innocent citizens for sectarian reasons."); a condemnation of the Ba'ath Party as "a terrorist organization" and an urge "to speed up the trial of overthrown president Saddam Hussein"; and a decision to "postpone the implementation of the disputed principle of federalism".

This, in a nutshell, is the Shi'ite agenda for the new Iraq, potentially embracing 62% of the population of roughly 25 million to 26 million. The pact may have been a Sadrist move, but there's no reason to believe these decisions will not be implemented as the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), which is dominated by the SCIRI, Da'wa and the Sadrists, is set to become the majority in the new, 275-member Iraqi National Assembly. The whole numbers issue in the elections is by which percentage the UIA will be a majority compared to the Kurdistan coalition and the Iraqi Concord Front.

The main players

The UIA, list number 555, created with the blessing of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, received almost 50% of the votes in the January elections. Now the 18-party UIA is weaker because some parties defected. Sistani stated his position last Sunday. In January, he practically ordered all Shi'ites to vote for the UIA. Now, he is more nuanced. "These elections are just as important as the preceding ones, and citizens - both male and female - must participate in them on a wide scale in order to guarantee a big and powerful presence for those who will safeguard their verities and work energetically for their higher interests in the next parliament."

Although not explicitly endorsing the UIA, he did advise all Shi'ites to not split and not waste their vote; this would mean something like "vote for the UIA, not for Allawi". Politically, the UIA has been heavily criticized by Iraqis themselves for being utterly impotent - and incompetent - while dealing with corruption and fighting against both the Sunni Arab resistance and the jihadi groups.

The eight-party Kurdistan coalition list, number 730, remains dominated by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, headed by the current Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, and the Kurdish Democratic Party, headed by Masoud Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan. They have been allies to the UIA in government for the past 10 months, but the infighting is abysmal. The only thing the Kurds actually care about is Kirkuk and its oil wealth - and how they can prevent Sunni Arabs and Turkmen from having a slice of the cake.

Diane Lane
John Cusack

Must Love Dogs



Buy it Now
on DVD

perfect
match.com™

AS SEEN IN THE MOVIE

Find out how
you can get
2 months FREE!

©2006 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

PG-13

The 15-group Iraqi National List, number 731, secular and pan-sectarian, is headed by Allawi. The list includes the Communist Party, former foreign minister (pre-Saddam) Adnan al-Pachachi (a Sunni Arab), a few tribal sheikhs and even some liberal Shi'ite clerics.

They say they will fight the Sunni Arab resistance (would that mean leveling Ramadi now instead of Fallujah?), establish a strong central government (SCIRI, Da'wa and the Sadrists would never let them get away with it), revise the de-Ba'athification laws (so Allawi can get his former pals back to government) and return more former officers of the Iraqi Army disbanded by former proconsul L Paul Bremer to the new security forces (once again, over the dead body of the SCIRI, Da'wa and the Sadrists).

The Iraqi Concord Front, number 618, is an alliance of three mostly Islamist Sunni Arab groups. All of them boycotted the January elections. Their platform includes total American withdrawal, and of course bringing back former Sunni Arab Iraqi Army officers. They also want to change the constitution - again - eliminating the newfound regional power and reinforcing the authority of Baghdad.

The 10-party Iraqi National Congress (INC) list, number 569, is headed by former Pentagon asset, current deputy prime minister and eternal revivalist, Chalabi. He split from the UIA to form his own group. Chalabi obviously preaches fighting against the Sunni Arab resistance and in impeccable populist fashion promised every Iraqi family cash derived from Iraq's oil money plus a piece of land for every family that did not yet own a home.

All's well in militia hell

When they are not occupied dodging bullets or trying to spend at least one hour of the day with some water and electricity, Iraqis see rot piling up everywhere. The Allawi-Chalabi (they are cousins) mini-war gets dirtier by the day. The British government is according to some unconfirmed reports pulling out all the stops to stall an investigation into the theft of more than US\$1.3 billion from the Ministry of Defense. This favors - who else - Allawi, because the money "disappeared" during his corruption-infested six months as prime minister.

Then there's the rot in the Ministry of Interior. Bayan Jabr, the minister, is from the SCIRI. He controls about 110,000 men armed to their teeth. The SCIRI's militia, the Badr Organization, formerly the Badr Brigade, rule the ministry and have infiltrated paramilitary police commandos, which are in fact "legal" death squads specialized in terrorizing Sunni Arabs. In parallel, Muqtadar's Mahdi Army controls most of Baghdad's police. Many people tend to forget that Baghdad is a predominantly Shi'ite city.

This country is no more

None of this points to national cohesion. "Iraq" as we know it - the unified, heavily centralized state with arbitrary borders drawn on a paper napkin by Britain after World War I - may be on its way to extinction after these elections.

Partition is de facto in the four provinces of Kurdistan - roughly between 15% and 20% of the total population, self-governed and with their own army and police. The billion-dollar question is how the SCIRI, Da'wa and the Sadrists will conform a Shi'iteistan composed of nine Shi'ite provinces out of Iraq's 18. This would be

the logical outcome after the American-designed constitution approved in the October 15 referendum. The SCIRI's leader, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, definitely wants a Shi'iteistan.

The US would be left with little more than the Green Zone - which is not exactly an oil lake - and a lot of empty desert. Essentially, Kurds and Shi'ites will be able to decide what to do with their oil revenues. The Kurds, for instance, have already signed a contract with a Norwegian oil company to drill for oil.

Election or no election, the ultimate blood-drenched quagmire will remain fully operational. Al-Qaeda will keep suicide bombing to death. Shi'ite death squads will keep executing Sunni Arabs. Shi'ite and Kurd politicians will keep squabbling - while Kurdistan and Shi'iteistan further ignore Baghdad. The Americans will keep controlling nothing - not even the road from the airport to the Green Zone. "Reconstruction" will remain non-existent - until the probably not-too-distant day when the Shi'ite signatories of the "pact of honor" - the probable election winners - will muster the will to tell the occupiers "you're out - and don't forget to pack your military bases as well".

(Copyright 2005 Asia Times Online Ltd. All rights reserved. Please contact us for information on [sales, syndication](#) and [republishing](#) .)

[Yahoo! Messenger with Voice - Free PC-to-PC Calls Worldwide](#)

All material on this website is copyright and may not be republished in any form without written permission.

© Copyright 1999 - 2005 Asia Times Online Ltd.

Head Office: Rm 202, Hau Fook Mansion, No. 8 Hau Fook St., Kowloon, Hong Kong
Thailand Bureau: 11/13 Petchkasem Road, Hua Hin, Prachuab Kirikhan, Thailand 77110