

Iraq – Analysis January 17, 2005
Rick McDowell & Mary Trotochaud

Note: Based in Amman over the past several months, we are in contact with scores of Iraqis. With few exceptions, their story is one of despair as hope becomes a casualty of war. This said, Iraqis maintain a belief in the future of their country.

The war and occupation of Iraq has been a disaster. The prognoses for Iraq's immediate future is increasingly bleak, as security and the provision of basic services deteriorate. As Iraqis struggle daily for survival, an increasing number of Iraqis and internationals admit the possibility of a decline into civil war in a country which has historically avoided such conflict. If predictions of civil war are realized, the consequences to the region and world will be significant.

Although many Iraqis believe the US should pull out immediately, it is important to recognize that a surprising number of Iraqis and many in the international community believe the presence of US forces is the only factor preventing the immediate slide into civil war. How long US forces can play this perceived role is in question.

Iraqis are demanding a public commitment by the US Administration to withdraw its forces and terminate its bases amidst a defined timeline. A timeline may become a moot point if US forces can't quickly prevent the present fall into chaos. The recent decision by the US Administration to refuse to commit to a timeline for the removal of troops, as a pre-condition for Sunni involvement in the upcoming elections, is a serious miscalculation.

Forty to fifty percent of the population is not expected to participate in the elections. If the Sunni minority or large segments of the population fail to vote, as expected, the result may be a drift further into chaos and violence. If violence spirals out of control in center-south, predictions are the Kurds in the north will attempt to consolidate power, take control of Kirkuk and potentially separate from the rest of Iraq. Additionally, there exists the possibility of a separatist movement in the south.

Iraqis have been drawn together over the years by the commonality of war, sanctions and dictatorship. People identified themselves as Iraqis, not Shiite, Sunni, Kurd or Christian. One of the first acts of the occupation was to structure the interim government along religious and ethnic lines, which contributed to the current chasms. Most of the 111 registered parties (7000 plus candidates) have not stated their political or ideological agendas. Instead, they have depended upon religious or ethnic labels which contribute to a growing sectarianism. These factors, coupled with the current violence, rumors and misinformation, are serving to polarize the country along religious and ethnic lines.

Iraqis acknowledge the power vacuum created when the US occupation disbanded Iraq's military and security forces. This vacuum has been filled by many elements including

armed militias. Estimates of the Iraqi insurgency have increased from fifteen to twenty thousand in November to current estimates of 200,000 armed fighters and supporters. According to UN sources, 43 separate insurgency groups have been identified. These range from nationalists resisting the occupation to Saddam loyalists, criminals, foreign fighters, religious extremists, survivors of US and multinational forces attacks and atrocities and others. There is an increase in the numbers of attacks on police and security forces and anyone perceived as collaborating with the occupation or influenced by the West. An estimated 1,300 Iraqi police have been killed since the “so-called” handover of power on June 28 2004. Over the past few weeks, reports of anti-coalition forces brazenly attacking in broad daylight and without the cover of ski masks or black hoods, while Iraqi police and security forces don masks in fear for their lives, suggest the insurgency is increasingly in control of major cities and towns.

There is increasing evidence that a significant part of the insurgency is financed and orchestrated by members of the former regime or Saddam loyalists from both inside and outside of Iraq. Perhaps most alarming and increasingly discussed by Iraqis is the apprehension that these elements are intent on regaining power. If they succeed, there is fear amongst the Shia that a slaughter, reminiscent of 1991, will follow. On the other hand, many Sunnis fear a Shia controlled government will precipitate a “pay-back” campaign against the Sunni.

A US military siege on the restive northern city of Mosul, with a population of over two million, is feared. Violence and attacks on coalition forces based in Mosul have continued to increase since the recent siege of Fallujah. US forces have responded in-kind. Friends in Mosul speak of family members arrested and detained in large sweeps by US forces, evacuations of parts of the city, aerial bombardment, closures of bridges and roads and major communication and power outages. Fear amongst the civilian population is heightened as the full extent of the destruction to Fallujah is realized: two-thirds of the city of 300,000 leveled, three of four water treatment facilities destroyed and over 200,000 residents displaced outside of the city.

The escalation in suicide and car bombs, targeted assassinations, kidnappings and the imposition of martial law with the resulting curfews have made life increasingly precarious. Shortages of food and medicine, electricity, propane for cooking, kerosene for heating and gasoline for cars and generators (lines at gasoline stations are two days long), a manipulation and breakdown in communication (telephone and email) and increases in the price of food and commodities are leading many Iraqis to contend that conditions are the worst in living memory.

Acute malnutrition among young children in Iraq has doubled since the US led invasion. An estimated 400,000 children, under the age of five, are suffering “wasting,” a condition characterized by chronic diarrhea and dangerous deficiencies in protein. One in four Iraqis remain dependant on government food rations to survive.

Over the past two years there has been a significant increase of Iraqi refugees to neighboring countries, especially Jordan and Syria. The numbers of refugees and their

situation is difficult to assess because neither country recognizes the refugee population; however, there is estimated to be up to 400,000 Iraqis in Jordan and 500,000 in Syria.

The bombing of the UN headquarters in August 2003 followed by the bombing of the ICRC offices in October 2003, with the resultant casualties, precipitated the departure of many internationals. Kidnapping and assassination of internationals, including aid workers, have furthered the exodus of many in the international NGO community. Most organizations operate from “remote control,” depending on local staff to implement projects and programs. The so-called humanitarian efforts of the occupation and its multi-national forces and relief efforts by legitimate and recognized humanitarian organizations has resulted in a blurring of the lines and have had a profound affect on the latter’s ability to operate within a measure of safety and provide much needed emergency relief and development.

Action:

The US and world community must be committed to a political rather than a military solution. The following measures must be considered:

- postponement of elections until the majority of Iraqis are able to participate
- the removal of US troops and bases amidst a defined timeline
- an end to offensive US military operations and a troop pullout from population centers
- restoration of Iraqi sovereignty
- US commitment to long-term financial support for an Iraqi-led reconstruction
- a serious commitment to the rebuilding of a legitimate Iraqi security force
- insuring UN control over resources committed to Iraq’s reconstruction
- holding US contractors accountable for terms of contracts and expenditure of taxpayer dollars
- demanding the United Nations increase protections for Iraq’s minority populations, including Christians

As the Bush Administration holds UN Secretary General Kofi Annan accountable for the mismanagement of the UN’s Oil for Food Program, so must the current and previous US Administrations be held accountable for violations of US and international law, including:

maintaining the deadly policy of economic sanctions years after Iraq had eliminated its weapons of mass destruction, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and the impoverishment of a nation

the unilateral decision to invade Iraq without the approval of the Security Council

invading and occupying Iraq on the pretext of weapons of mass destruction

failing to protect Iraq's ministries and antiquities

failing to restore security and basic services

the Human Rights abuses committed at Abu Ghraib and other prisons and detention centers which were condoned at the highest levels

policies of collective punishment

the impunity soldiers, commanders and contractors realize from the killing and imprisonment of innocent civilians

This article was published received from the authors and published non-exclusively on January 18, 2005, by Traprock Peace Center – <http://www.traprockpeace.org>