

Who Speaks for the Iraqi People?

by
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I

Nearly nine decades after Britain recast the map of Iraq, installed a group of ex-Ottoman officers and Arab-Sunni landowners with a Hijazi emir at the helm to rule over Iraq's people, the U.S., with Britain playing a supporting role, has choreographed a meeting, in wintry London in mid-December 2002, of a hodge-podge group of Iraqi self-proclaimed liberals, politico-religious figures, ex-Ba'athists, and ex-high ranking security and military personnel to serve as the new epiphany to perpetuate a century-old script, once U.S.-U.K. jetfighters and bombers rain hell over the hapless inhabitants of Iraq: exogenous, hierarchical reign grounded in ethno-sectarian chauvinism and wedded to varying forms and intensities of repression.

Now as then, the enlisted group cries for an Iraq different from the prevalent downtrodden one and claims that invading armies are coming to the aid of the helpless populace. It is almost an identical reproduction of various episodes in history: a (necessarily) new cast and minor change to the montage, but with novel methods for executing the plot—after all it is the 21st century. One further significant difference, though. The Shiite religious establishment at the turn of the twentieth century had the foresight and resolve to recognize the true motives of the British occupiers, and had thus raised encompassing and inclusive slogans for the liberation of Iraq from foreign control/influence, and called for independence and indigenous self-rule. Their 21st century imposters (al-Hakeem *et al.*, see below) pledge unmitigated subservience to power—in all its manifestations. The people, no doubt, will rebound and revolt, alas later rather than sooner: years of ruthless Ba'athist repression, devastating wars and genocidal economic sanctions would incapacitate and demoralize any people, anywhere. However, their historical memory is still vivid and strong; they do need time to collect the shattered pieces and they will pull up their socks, as the British learned all too well in 1918 and 1920. The sequel to the meeting of the “blessed group” was to take place in Iraqi Kurdistan in January of this year, but this has been

delayed time and again since the U.S. now regards it as unnecessary to its preparatory plans for war against Iraq. Using segments of the Iraqi opposition as their fig-leaf for claiming liberation had served its purpose to befuddle western populations and provide false hope to the weary, nostalgic and confused Iraqi exile/émigré community; the preparation and build-up for war are at a far too advanced stage to merit a secondary distraction.¹

The honeymoon has been disrupted then, and cracks (of relational intimacy?) have begun to surface among the members making up the “blessed group,” on the one hand, and between them and their principal financier-cum-guarantor, on the other. But is there any substance to suggest that these inchoate cracks may develop into catastrophic fractures between the Anglo-American sponsored Iraqi opposition and its protector? The relationship has, from the beginning, been one of complete submission on the part of this select Iraqi group, who has been unquestioningly accepting of explicit agenda-setting, control and domination by the U.S. patron.² There exists no evidence to suggest independent decision-making on the part of these Iraqi oppositionists, or the 65-member follow-up committee appointed at the end of the London meeting. Several independents had participated in the London meeting and have since withdrawn claiming as reason the undemocratic conduct in which the follow-up committee was instituted, as well as concern about its membership. Two prominent members are Wafeeq al-Samarra’i, head of military intelligence until 1996, and Misha’an al-Jubouri, high-ranking Ba’athist functionary responsible for many of the crimes committed against the participants of the ill-fated 1991 uprising—that claimed no less than 200,000 civilian lives (excluding those perished as a result of the U.S.-led onslaught).³

Kanan Makiya, the self-appointed spokesperson for the Iraqi people, and favorite of many media outlets in Britain and the U.S., was a key member of the London conveners and the follow-up committee; he is a close associate of Ahmed Chalabi, head of the Iraqi National Congress. In preparation for the London meeting, Makiya presented a list of 50 academics and professionals for vetting by the U.S. administration prior to dispatching invitations for attendance. He was also instrumental in tabling a paper, prepared in conjunction with State Department officials and right-wing think-tanks, which defined the means and scope of change in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. Makiya had clearly expressed this vision in an article published in the November issue of the British magazine *Prospect*. He demanded in that piece, and elsewhere since the Gulf war of 1991, that U.S. troops invade Iraq in

order to secure régime change, and could see no other way for deposing Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist régime. He has thus been extremely supportive of war and welcoming of U.S. adoption of military action towards Iraq, which, he approvingly acknowledges "is driven, of course, by strategic American considerations post-11th September."⁴ Makiya calls for a territoriality-based federated Iraq where decision-making is devolved to regions "in which each ... receives its share of national resources (including oil money) according to the relative size of its population." This, he informs us, is "what is in effect happening in northern Iraq now, through the UN's oil-for-food programme."⁵ The two principal pillars of Makiya's, and indeed the U.S., vision for Iraq is that it be non-Arab and demilitarized.

Iraqi Kurdistan has actually been a failed experiment. Many of us, in the aftermath of the Gulf war, had eagerly looked to a burgeoning form of democratic organization and self-rule. What resulted instead were two regions, eastern and western, controlled by the PUK and KDP respectively. The parliament has been ineffectual since neither leader of the two main Kurdish parties would accept the result of a democratic election. There have therefore existed two parliaments with two prime ministers, one from the PUK and another from the KDP. Customs from legal and illegal goods transported through Kurdistan to and from the rest of Iraq have been the driving motive for this territorial split. The *modus operandi* for the Kurdish political parties remains one of tribal allegiance, and tribes control regions, thus the split. In spite of Makiya's ostentatious claims to the contrary, his vision of territorial devolution is steeped in ethno-religious divides and is a recipe for further fragmentation—into three explicit regions: a northern region for the Kurds, a southern one for the (mostly) Shi'a Arabs and a central one for (mostly) the Sunnis. His plans for the country become clear when he avers that "the government of the U.S., further to a treaty with a new duly instituted Iraqi government, agrees to keep military presence inside Iraq, whose purpose is to guarantee the territorial integrity of Iraq for a period measured in years, not months."⁶ This is a euphemism for mandated control, and it is akin to what Britain had envisaged for Iraq in the first half of the twentieth century.

Moreover, finding a common language with U.S. policy makers, especially the current hawks in Washington, Makiya calls for a fragmentation of Iraqi territory according to the concentration of oil resources: Iraq is known to have the second largest proven reserves (112 billion barrels), but there are many more untapped; the U.S. government puts the estimate at 432 billion

barrels—cf. Saudi Arabia, whose 259 billion barrels is currently regarded as the largest reserve.⁷ It should now be crystal clear what a demilitarized, territorialitized and federated Iraq, whose geopolitical entity is guaranteed by the U.S. through treaties, signifies: Control over the richest oil resources—Iraq and the region’s bloody curse—by the planet’s sole imperial military and economic power.

The fact that Iraq becomes non-Arab is to assuage the Israelis and initiate a new phase of regional re-mapping of influence. The Baghdad Pact of the first half of the twentieth century was intended to bring together Iraq, Trans-Jordan, Turkey and the nascent Israel into a new power center that Britain could manipulate and control. The Pact was also to serve as a geopolitical conduit to Asia and Africa, especially that British control over India was waning. The plan failed, as did its precursor, the Portsmouth Treaty of 1948—designed to link Iraq politically, economically and militarily to Britain along similar lines to U.S. and Makiya’s desires: thanks to enormous popular discontent within Iraq, which pressured the government through sustained and magnificent demonstrations. Opposition to the underlying principles of the Portsmouth Treaty and the Baghdad Pact grew in intensity, organization and resolve over the next decade, and ultimately culminated in toppling the monarchy and establishing Iraq’s first republic. As I argued in the Fall 2002 issue of *Logos*, Iraq’s plans to nationalize its oil fields in 1960 prompted the U.S., the burgeoning political and military power after WWII, to devise plans for “régime change.” The Ba’athists came to power in a bloody coup on February 8, 1963, removed progressives from the political scene and plunged the country into a spiral of political instability and years of repression, and, in the final analysis, indeed paved the road, if not colluded, to firmly placing Iraq under the U.S. sphere of influence. Iraq’s tragedy is this nexus of imperial designs and brutal dictators—whose existence is dependent on subservience to and protection by the imperial power—that will continue to impoverish its people, unless and until progressives—Iraqi, Arab, American and others—clearly recognize, understand and work realistically to end it. In the meantime, the charade continues, and today oppositionists will become tomorrow’s brutal oppressors in order to maintain privilege and office (real power is, lest we forget, lies elsewhere), since they are essentially devoid of a popular mandate.

II

So Makiya, the INC, *et al.* hope for a U.S.-led war, encourage an invasion and occupation of Iraq, request that the U.S. be Iraq's long-term guarantor and protector, and *yet* were surprised when the Bush Administration officially announced over recent weeks that it plans to install a U.S. general to rule Iraq, have senior U.S. military personnel occupy all senior government positions while retaining current Ba'athist cadre for running the country, then gradually move to a U.S.-sponsored civilian administration, and ultimately (perhaps) permit Iraqis rule themselves!⁸ Makiya, Chalabi *et al.* are either first-class hypocrites, or, if one is kind, dupes. Alas, I do not believe them to be dupes; they marvelously represent the decrepit state of political discourse prevalent in the Arab world. Again, the progeny of how (any local) dictatorial rule is inherently intertwined with imperial hegemonic plans, which, as a combination, seriously attempt to eliminate any legitimate opposition to either. The U.S. has superbly succeeded in having both Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist régime and a significant portion of the opposition to it subsumed under its wing.

Local, brutal dictators do not grow on trees, and they are not exclusive Iraqi, Arab, Muslim or third-world phenomena. Material conditions contribute to their evolution. The U.S., since the early seventies and sealed during the Carter Administration, have regarded the whole Middle East region as its sphere of influence. The demise of the Soviet Union vacated the ground for a steady and resolute determination of these plans, the first being the Gulf war, which securely established U.S. presence in the Arabian/Persian Gulf region. The débâcle in ex-Yugoslavia, and what ensued, gave the U.S. a firm foothold in eastern and central Europe. Osama bin Laden, America's creation and scion of terror and regress, gave it the *carte blanche* it needed to enter the oil-rich central republics of the former Soviet Union. The first unchallenged empire in human history now seems arrogantly confident that it can spread its hegemony the world over, unhindered. With securing Iraq, as a logical next step in this plan, the U.S. will, for the foreseeable future, hold the reigns over Europe, Japan, China and evolving economies of Asia, since it will now *directly* control the major oil resources of the world. And one is only (rationally) to expect that democracy will not be on their agenda for Iraq, Saudi Arabia or elsewhere in the region. The argument that oil-producing countries—whoever rules them—would still need outside markets to sell their oil, and hence the U.S. may well become their genuine partner and thus help promote liberal and democratic changes in those countries, is myopic and incomplete. The U.S., as the sole superpower, intends to consolidate its power and control, not dilute them. If democratic rule is truly permitted in

the Arab world, then the latter would be free to hold dealings as best befits its inhabitants. There may result a serious dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians towards a just resolution to the 50-year old conflict; and the latter could not then be used as the fig leaf for denying democracy for the Arabs, on the one hand, or cornering the Israeli people into an interminable cycle of fear, security-measures and repression of the Palestinians, on the other. There is thus a palpable link between the tragedies of Iraq and Palestine, and it must be understood within the political and economic contexts of global and regional hegemony.

Capitalist economies are essentially manufacturing-based and necessarily require a stable supply of affordable energy for their sustenance. The 20th-century revolution in information technology was not intended to supplant the basic mechanism through which the capitalist industrial economy churns away; thus, there is no credible argument to suggest a decline in reliance on Middle Eastern oil.⁹ To the contrary, as the Asian economies fully integrate into the world capitalist economy, demand for oil will increase and, so will the necessity for untrammled control over its resources.¹⁰

While maintaining similar overall objectives, the means of arriving at them began to vary—insofar as the Iraq questions was concerned—under the George W. Bush administration from that of Clinton. The Clinton administration saw containment as an effective policy of control, hence, the institutionalization/perpetuation of the genocidal economic sanctions against Iraq's people. It knew that, sooner rather than later, it would secure control over Iraq's oil fields once the country and its rulers are reduced to complete subjugation and the people to utter misery. No one can seriously speak of a sovereign Iraq since 1991: Anglo-American war planes control the airspace north of the 36° and south of the 33° parallels, and Turkey has made several deep incursions inside north of Iraq claiming to hunt PKK fighters hiding in the mountains. Saddam Hussein's government continued, rhetoric notwithstanding, to offer more and more concessions to U.S. demands, while tremendously benefiting from the genocidal economic sanctions to strengthen its inner core and further contribute to impoverishing and reining in the populace. Between one and two million Iraqi professionals have sought refuge, since 1991, in Jordan, Yemen, Libya, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the West and elsewhere in pursuit of securing some decent living for themselves and their families. If they are not crippled by depleted uranium-caused terminal diseases or old age, they flee the country. That is

the outcome of years of Ba'athist repression, western collusion and, more recently, genocidal economic sanctions.

The Bush entourage differs ideologically in terms of how to realize these common objectives; besides, the terror attacks of 9/11 gave the administration the excuse it needed not to hold off. It is well known that Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, pushed for attacking Iraq mere days after the terror attacks. Henry Kissinger's dictum of some 30 years ago was now to be fully attained: Oil is too important to be kept in Arab hands.

Every step taken by the current U.S. administration supports the above analysis. The war against Iraq will be launched, in spite of opposing world public opinion and regardless of whether a second UN resolution is passed or not and immaterial of its contents. At the time of writing, U.S. and British troops are in place in Kuwait (and elsewhere in the Gulf region), and more U.S. troops will soon be positioned in Turkey. Last minute shuttling between capitals and endeavors to table and pass resolutions is all too reminiscent of shuttle diplomacy on the part of the erstwhile Soviet Union, France and others to avert the 1991 Gulf war. The 200,000-plus U.S.-British troops are not vacationing in the Gulf region; they are there to secure U.S. global hegemony: the empire shall be unchallenged. We will no doubt also learn of war crimes akin to the 1991 incineration of 400-plus civilians at al-Amerriya bomb shelter, destruction of bridges, water treatment and electrical facilities, etc. In exemplary, pre-emptive apologetics, James Dao of *The New York Times* has already given us a glimpse of what to expect: "Could too much regard for Iraqi lives imperil U.S. troops?"¹¹ And there will be a flock of intellectuals and experts extolling the killings as victory for democracy and the free world. And, the sad fact, there will be some—perhaps many?—who will sheepishly believe their rancorous, racist ranting.

In the midst of war preparations, Iraqi children, women and men continue to die daily. Several hundred kilometers away, Ariel Sharon levels Palestinian villages and towns and kills its inhabitants with impunity: "Sharon is a man of peace," Bush famously exclaimed; and killing innocent civilians while allegedly pursuing terrorists and tyrants is allowed—and never mind the Geneva Convention, because it will soon be shunned by the world's sole imperial power, much like Kyoto, the ICC and a host of other treaties and bodies.

Cruelty begets cruelty, as violence breeds violence; and ignorance further nurtures an already aggravated situation. The (animal) instinct of survival is bound to spring viciousness when marrying oppression and destitution of the one vis-à-vis the arrogance of power by the other. It would then be illogical, even criminal, to blame the victims for actions that are only reflections of their immediate surroundings. *No one* is to condone them; however, one must understand the whys and wherefores of their emergence. War is hell, and occupation is demeaning and dehumanizing. Helpless, besieged victims will resort to debased tactics, and we must not forget why and how it started.

III

“When we consider the role of intellectuals,” Noam Chomsky elucidated some three decades ago, “our basic concern must be their role in the creation and analysis of ideology.”¹² Makiya, like Fuad Ajami, Fawaz Gerges and other apologists for the U.S. emporium, uses a one-dimensional approach steeped in pseudo-psychoanalytical examination of human history and imbued with glorified theories of cultural specificity. He, as they, misses the social dynamics of human history, and extols the virtues of exclusivity. Hence his call for a non-Arab Iraq, wishing to transplant in its place an exogenous anything—for the sheer reason that it is different, and must thus be superior. Paraded as “a leading Iraqi dissident intellectual,” “a democrat,” he has seemingly found no time, prior to the publication of *Republic of Fear* in 1989 using the alias Samir al-Khalil, to publicly speak or write on the cruelties committed in Iraq. Neither did he deem appropriate, nor essential, decrying the mass forced deportations of Iraqi Shi’ites that began in the seventies and continued ferociously throughout the early eighties. However, he narcissistically preaches idealism to the Arab youth: “A new self-critical discourse is needed, one that is rooted in a thoroughgoing insistence upon the inviolable sanctity of human life and subordination of everything else to this criterion.”¹³ Not a word has ever been uttered by Makiya criticizing the genocidal economic sanctions and the half million to one million dead children, women and men: not a hint of “the inviolable sanctity of human life.” Still, using the alias al-Khalil, he wrote shortly after the Gulf war, in a booklet entitled *The Unfinished War: Democracy in Iraq and the Requirement for Alliance*¹⁴: “Was it necessary to kill so many Iraqis, knowing fully well they were not interested in fighting? And was it necessary to paralyze the entire country?” (p. 36) However, he hastened to add, six pages later, that “the only way for the Americans to heal the wounds of the [Gulf] war, and to ensure

that it not be talked of in negative connotations, is by extending their helping hand to those Iraqis hoping for a different government in Iraq.”

Makiya never tires of looking for solutions externally, and internally for the roots of all of Arab problems. America, the more superior civilization, will salve and save Iraq; the Arabs betrayed Iraq because they were silent during Saddam Hussein's years of repression; Arab society is backward because of deep, inherent, unresolvable contradictions. Having sheltered himself from public commentary on Iraqi politics while safely and comfortably living in the West, he pours his scorn on leftist Arab intellectuals for not doing more. He attacks the very ones who, using their real names, did not waver from speaking or writing uncompromisingly: Abdel Rehman Munif, stripped of his Saudi nationality for writing the courageous quintet, *Cities of Salt*, has been a penetrating critic of Iraq and other Arab states; Fawaz Trabulsi, who had spent many years fighting during the Lebanese civil war, has tirelessly written on social and undemocratic ills in the Arab world; Edward Said, who has hardly spared a moment without critiquing Palestinian or Arab leaders for the morass the Arab world is in, continually reflected on the past. He scoffs at those, and ignores unrelenting leftist Iraqi writers and intellectuals who—unlike him—did not spare an opportunity to publicly critique the Ba'athist régime, Arab-Islamic heritage or social ills: the likes of the late Hadi al-Alawi, Muthafar al-Nawwab and Saadi Youssef. However, he says nothing of Iraqi liberal writers living in the West who, like him, have been silent about Saddam Hussein's long history of crimes—but have only recently found ample opportunity to do so.

In summary, Makiya prostitutes the plight of the Iraqis; he summersaults the moral argument by obfuscating the devastating effects of sanctions, yet calls for more death and destruction to purportedly save Iraqis; he weighs heavily on the interventionist factor versus belief in the people's ability to make history; he absolves the U.S. from the role it has played in impoverishing and demoralizing the populace; and he shamelessly views Iraq's, and the Arab world's, entire complex of social problems through a reductionist, culturalist prism.¹⁵

IV

There are no shortcuts to establishing democracy in any country, and Iraq is no exception. If it is to be genuine and long lasting, democracy must grow

organically and its roots must emerge from a fearless critique of the status quo: Saddam Hussein's chauvinist régime must be gotten rid of before any prospect for genuine democratic change can ensue, but this cannot be effected through military intervention, whose objectives serve U.S. imperial interests, and not those of the people of Iraq. To miss either point would prove catastrophic for the inhabitants of that country. Iraq, having suffered decades of ruthless despotism and strangulation, can emerge from this morass if we are to understand that it possesses the human, intellectual, historical, and, above all, the will for effecting this change. In spite of decades of political repression, the populace, at large, endeavored to be educated, cultured and worldly, have a sense of humor, and build their country. They have had an astounding will for progress. However, we must not eschew that hope has slowly become absent from Iraqi lexicon as the Anglo-American alliance, under UN guise, besieged the country with economic sanctions that effectively strengthened Saddam Hussein's régime even further and made the populace more dependent on it than ever. *Thus*, the confused and misguided expectations from an invasion that a large portion of exiles and émigrés seems to pin their hopes on, and the almost nonchalant atmosphere among Iraqis inside Iraq. They are dying daily, being politically repressed daily, being bombarded by British and U.S. warplanes almost daily, and being shunned from securing a decent existence for their offspring. People of the world, especially the American people, must fathom this morbid reality. I cannot emphasize enough the fact that Saddam Hussein and his entire régime are as dangerous to Iraqis as the Bush war and U.S. hegemonic plans: Imperialism has found—and still does—faithful allies in local third-world dictators: Saddam Hussein is the brutal example *par excellence*.

The impressive demonstrations and marches that swept more than 600 cities the world over on February 15 is a damning testimony of opposition to looming war plans. However, the peace movement needs to be sophisticated enough to provide a cogent critique of the Iraq questions by truly incorporating the aspirations of Iraqis for a free and democratic Iraq—a critique grounded in a universal conception of humanity, social justice and self-determination free of corporate greed and ethno-religious chauvinisms; a critique necessarily opposed to such condescending, if not racist, utterances as Colin Powell's that "Iraq is not ready for Jeffersonian democracy."

If the world is to show its solidarity with the people of Iraq, it must continue its push to avert war and, in the likely event that war begins, to stop it. An

alternative scenario to military action is possible, but it requires focus and it need be based on a framework wedded to:

1. the *unconditional and immediate* lifting of the genocidal economic sanctions;
2. supporting the struggle of Iraqis to establish a free, democratic and federal Iraq for all its inhabitants—free of political, religious, sectarian, ethnic or gender discrimination;
3. the convening of an international conference involving representatives of all of Iraq's opposition forces, under UN sponsorship, to facilitate the peaceful unseating of Saddam Hussein and his government and the establishment of democratic rule through free elections;
4. presenting to the International Criminal Court a list of Iraqi officials, inside and outside Iraq, responsible for committing crimes against humanity;
5. presenting to the ICC a list of UN officials, as well as U.S., British and other nationals, complicit in the genocide against Iraqis through the imposition and perpetuation of economic sanctions;
6. presenting for trial a list of U.S. officials and military personnel responsible for the premeditated mutilation and murder of Iraqi civilians—in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibiting the endangerment of civilian lives in times of war—resulting from the enduring effects of using depleted uranium against Iraqis during the 1991 Gulf war;
7. bringing to trial U.S. government and military officials responsible for the destruction of Iraq's civilian infrastructure (water treatment and electric facilities, bridges, etc.) during the Gulf war, and for causing immense harm to its civilian population as a result;
8. bringing to trial U.S. government and military functionaries responsible for the destruction of a civilian bomb shelter, al-Amerriya, and causing the death of over 400 civilians;
9. bringing to trial Kuwaiti and Saudi government officials responsible for providing financial backing to Saddam Hussein's régime, during the 1980s, to prolong the Iran-Iraq War and for being complicit in the premeditated murder of over 500,000 Iraqi and Iranian soldiers;
10. bringing to trial Kuwait and Saudi government officials responsible for aiding and abetting the torture and murder of Iraqi civilians through the explicit provision of monetary support to Saddam Hussein's ruthless nexus of security and intelligence apparatuses;

11. bringing to trial Iraqi business and professional persons who knowingly traded with/for front companies and provided logistical and financial support for Saddam Hussein's official outlets, inside and outside Iraq, responsible for incarceration, torture and murder of Iraqi political opponents, inside and outside Iraq;
12. bringing to trial Iraqi and Arab business persons who knowingly sold expired medication to Iraq since 1991, that resulted in untold deaths amongst Iraqi civilians.¹⁶

This is a serious, albeit a provisional, list that would require serious examination and study, as well as careful consideration as to how and where due process and procedure must be followed. Almost definitely, further additions would be necessary.

The Iraqi people deserve a serious and genuine chance to build democracy and put the shadow of wars, suffering and lost hopes behind them for good. The Palestinian people deserve the same, as do all Arabs and other peoples. The peace movement, if to gain credibility in the eyes of the Iraqi and other peoples, needs to educate the public in their respective countries with unadulterated facts, build links with emerging social groups in the developing world through a genuine dialogue free of lifelong Eurocentric, condescending attitudes, and, equally importantly, develop realistic, heterarchical, workable scenarios that would ensure long-lasting peace and progress for inhabitants of this planet. Let us learn from the proud lessons of ATTAC and the World Social Forum: How these were built, and how they grew in less than five years. An alternative world is possible, but I am not naïve to think it will materialize overnight. After all, "Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."¹⁷

28 February, 2003

Notes

¹ The BBC World Service reported on February 26, 2003 the arrival of Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. administration's envoy to the Iraqi opposition, in Iraqi Kurdistan and—finally—the convening of the meeting in a subdued atmosphere. Khalilzad was reported to have informed those convened of plans to install a US military commander, Tommy Franks, as ruler of Iraq after invasion. He expressed the Administration's disapproval of announcing any Iraqi government-in-exile on the part of those oppositionists. Camera snapshots showed Jalal Talabani, head of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, warmly embrace Khalilzad and an accompanying official wearing U.S. military fatigues. With Turkey being promised a handsome largesse by the U.S. administration that secured the use of Turkish airbases and land by invading U.S. troops, and a green-light to enter its own troops into northern Iraq, and perhaps capture oil-rich Kirkuk, the Kurds of Iraq, blighted by a myopic and opportunistic leadership, will most likely be betrayed yet again by the Americans. One awaits nervously the advance of the Turkish army, notorious for its decades-long repression of the Kurds of Turkey.

² These groups are more accurately referred to as “political kiosks.” They came to being after 1991 and have been fully co-opted by one foreign intelligence service or another, but predominantly by those of the U.S. Their emergence stems from two principal historical reasons: First, years of Ba'athist repression leading to the fragmentation of genuine political opposition, and second, U.S. desire to find various avenues to control political discourse over Iraq. For more on this, see my “Iraq's Tragedy: Waiting for Godot!” in *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture*, Fall, 2002.

³ The majority of membership—more than three-quarters—comes from:

1. The Iraqi National Congress, INC, principally comprising professionals, businessmen and a sprinkling of liberal émigrés, led by Ahmed Chalabi, scion of one of Baghdad's oldest wealthy business and landowning families, who has historically been close to British officials since the period of the Iraq mandate; Chalabi, himself, is close to the Pentagon and the White House; the INC has attempted, with limited success, to project itself as an umbrella organization that includes the groups listed below; Ahmed Chalabi was indicted in Jordan, in absentia, for fraud and theft in the Petra Bank fiasco;
2. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK, led by Jalal Talabani, who had, over the years, vacillated in aligning himself with the Americans, Iranians, and even Saddam Hussein's government;
3. The Kurdistan Democratic Party, KDP, led by Mas'oud Barazani, a feudal landowner, who, too, had recycled allegiance between the Americans, Iranians and Saddam Hussein's government;
4. The Iraqi National Accord, INA, a small group of mainly ex-military officers and disaffected Ba'athists, led by Ayad Alawi, a former Ba'athist and participant in the 1963 bloody coup that overthrew the first republic; Alawi has been suspected of personally supervising torture of Iraqi leftists and communists in the aftermath of the 1963 coup; he is said to be close to the British intelligence community;
5. The Constitutional Monarchist Movement, CMM, led by Ali ibin al-Hussein, distant relation to King Faisal II, who was deposed in 1958; he is said to have been favored by elements within the British Foreign Office, and has been gaining wider acceptance within circles of the U.S. administration; and

6. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI—a much older organization than any of the above—led by Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakeem, son of Ayatollah Muhsen al-Hakeem who, in the early sixties, colluded with right-wing Arab-nationalists and Ba'athists in Iraq by passing a fatwa barring the Shi'a from entering the Iraqi Communist Party, the largest mass movement in the country—and region—at the time; SCIRI had operated out of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and since, and is close to the decision-making elements within the Iranian government: an apparent anomalous addition to the list, however, this group is the only one that commands some palpable support inside Iraq.
7. The remaining membership comprises independents (liberals, Arab-nationalists and Islamists, both Sunni and Shi'ite), and senior ex-government officials. It is worthy of note that representation was not proportional to the size of organization, rather to its closeness to U.S. decision-makers. Hence, the INC had the lion's share, followed by the Kurdish parties, the INA, former government officials and the monarchists.

The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), small groupings of left-leaning Arab-nationalists, and al-Da'wa (Islamic Call) party—the largest Shi'ite politico-religious organization, which has also been at odds with SCIRI—boycotted the London meeting. While there still exists schisms within al-Da'wa party itself vis-à-vis participation in U.S.-sponsored meetings, a senior representative of the party was later sent to Washington and expressed lip service to the proclaimed aims of the meeting. The ICP, to its credit, is still very critical of the whole premise and had been working with European leftist parties for an alternative call to avert war and help the Iraqi people end Saddam Hussein's despotic rule. It is worthwhile noting, that the ICP is perhaps the sole exiled opposition group that has serious following inside Iraq, albeit underground and rather small in numbers. It is the oldest political party in Iraq—and at one time the largest in the Middle East—and has always had multifarious membership spanning religious and ethnic divides.

⁴ Kanan Makiya, "After Saddam 1," *Prospect*, November 2002. (Obtainable from www.prospect-magazine.co.uk.)

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Robert Dreyfuss has presented cogent and detailed analysis of U.S. ambitions to control oil resources in especially the Gulf region. See his excellent "The Thirty-Year Itch," *Mother Jones* pp. 41-45, March and April 2003.

⁸ Makiya and Chalabi have written in the British and U.S. press complaining about what they term as the new turn in US policy, while still keeping their trust and faith in the U.S. salvaging Iraq and installing them and their cohorts as its new rulers. See, Kanan Makiya, "Our hopes betrayed," *The Observer*, February 16, 2002; and Ahmad Chalabi, "Iraq for the Iraqis—After the invasion, leave it to us to establish democracy," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 19, 2003.

⁹ While it is true that the U.S. has secured sources other than Middle Eastern for their oil supplies, such as Canada, Mexico, Venezuela and Nigeria, Middle Eastern oil is particularly crucial for Europe and Asia, and it is thus the power associated with controlling oil resources that is critical.

¹⁰ Recent fiascos inflicting the financial markets, from the implosion of the dot.com bubble to the explosion of speculative trading and their corollary of inflated company stock values,

can only confirm that capitalist dynamism requires maintaining a secure manufacturing base. Notwithstanding intermittent surges of recovery, the systemic crises that have afflicted latter-day capitalism continue and manifest in motley forms: the current U.S. economic recession is not showing signs of recovery, and a war against Iraq, although costly in the short term—Washington hawks, however, hope to have Iraqi oil recuperate most, if not all, costs—could ultimately prove beneficial to the U.S. economy. This is so because the military-industrial complex, a specificity (overwhelmingly) germane to the U.S. economy, has become the focal point upon which most other industries rely for their continued survival, especially in hard economic times of low consumer confidence. If the military-industrial complex significantly benefits from war contracts, and if U.S. military presence spreads farther across the globe, industries as diverse as pharmaceuticals, packaging, hygiene products and processed food, to name but a few, will benefit, too.

¹¹ James Dao, "Battle Plan: Spare Iraq's Civilians," *The New York Times*, Week in Review, p. 1, February 23, 2003.

¹² Noam Chomsky, "The Responsibility of Intellectuals," re-issued in *The Chomsky Reader*, pp. 59-82, New York, Pantheon Books, 1987.

¹³ Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World*, p. 317, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1993. See my extensive review of his book published in *The Arab Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Autumn 1993, pp. 40-48 (ISSN 0965-8319).

¹⁴ Published by al-Saqi Books, London, 1991 [in Arabic]. Quotes are my translation into English.

¹⁵ Makiya in *Cruelty and Silence* uses, in the first part of the book while examining the status of invading Iraqi troops into Kuwait (partially relying on the testimony of a member of the Kuwaiti royal family), a behavioral approach to psychologically profile Arabs, and subsequently draw conclusions as to their level of intellectual sophistication, cultural savvy and, ultimately, civilizational development. Consider, for instance, this passage: "According to Arab customs of hospitality, guests are expected to make appreciative noises at the dinner table that greatly please their hosts. Belching, on the other hand, is the pinnacle of rudeness when seated at a formal English dinner. Yet one thing that an Arab man must not do in public is the very thing that in a Western setting is considered involuntary and excusable: Fart." (p. 42)

¹⁶ The Iraqi Communist Party had tabled an appeal, adopted jointly with the New European Left Forum member parties, entitled: Stop the war before it starts, that incorporates points (2) and (3) above, as well as others. The interested reader may consult: www.iraqicp.org.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 93, in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991 revised edition.