

Bremer's 'Transition': Shotgun Wedding Will Not Work In Iraq

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The American plan to effect a "transition" to a new Quisling government in Iraq, reminds one of the attempt to organize a shotgun wedding at which the bridegroom does not appear. U.S. proconsul Paul Bremer finds himself in the embarrassing role of the father of the bride. If Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, the highest authority of the Shi'ites, does not agree to the plan, what Bremer wishes to impose, will not happen. And this is exactly the way events are unfolding.

The plan revolves around an agreement struck on Nov. 15 between Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), an *ersatz* government made up of Iraqis handpicked by the CPA. According to the deal, an interim government is to be selected by regional caucuses, and to take power on July 1. Elections are promised for next year, 2005.

Al-Sistani, who is based in Najaf, has repeatedly made clear that he will not accept such a procedure, as it violates international law; and demands that orderly elections be held both for a parliament, and for a constituent assembly to write a constitution. What al-Sistani says, goes, for the majority Shi'ite population in Iraq (and elsewhere). On Jan. 15, thirty-five thousand people demonstrated in Basra in favor of al-Sistani, demanding elections. Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, has been in constant contact with al-Sistani, whose outlook he shares. According to high-level Iranian sources in discussion with *EIR*, al-Hakim supports al-Sistani unconditionally. "There is no way that a foreign occupying force will be able to elect (even directly) a government," the source said. "Political and religious leaders do not accept any 'American' government."

Following extensive discussions, al-Hakim appealed to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the end of the year, asking that the UN intervene, in order to introduce legitimacy into the drafting of a constitution and holding of elections. International law gives the UN this authority. Annan replied on Jan. 8, according to a UN spokesman, but no details were released. Annan's overall position has been that, if one wants to meet the June 30 deadline for transfer of power, there is not adequate time to organize elections, which would require a census and the issuance of voter registration or other identification documents. This is the U.S. position as well, and Washington has been putting pressure on the Secretary General to stand firm. According to *Al Watan* in Saudi Arabia on Jan. 10, Annan planned to send a special delegate to al-Sistani, to explain that elections would take too much time, and that therefore, the Bremer plan should be accepted. An AP wire at the time quoted a "senior British official" who "said on condition of anonymity that Annan could play a key role in convincing al-Sistani that holding direct elections so soon is impossible. That could lead to a greater acceptance within Iraq for the transition process formulated by the United States."

'Halfway to the Resistance'

That proved an illusion. The Shi'ite leader maintained his principled stand. Bremer met with IGC officials—who in turn were meeting al-Sistani—in early January. The cited Iranian source told *EIR* on Jan. 8, that al-Sistani would not capitulate. A statement from his office said the U.S. plan for a transitional government in June, and elections next year, "does not ensure in any way the fair representation of the Iraqi people." Sistani insisted that elections be held before June, and, if that is not

feasible, that there must be “another solution that is honest to the Iraqi people’s demands.”

On January 11, Adnan Pachachi, a leading figure of the IGC and former diplomat in Iraq, met with al-Sistani, in an effort to break the deadlock. In a declaration issued through a spokesman, al-Sistani reiterated his demand that elections be held. His spokesman said, that any constitution or government put together by persons not elected by the Iraqi population, would not be legitimate. Al-Sistani’s office reported that he had told the IGC the following: “The ideal mechanism for this [transfer of power] is elections, which a number of experts confirm can be held within coming months with an acceptable degree of credibility and transparency. If the transitional assembly is formed by a mechanism that doesn’t have the necessary legitimacy, then it wouldn’t be possible for the government to perform a useful function. . . . New problems will arise as a result of this that will only worsen the tensions in the political and security situation.”

At the same time, an advertisement had been placed in an Iraqi newspaper, *al-Zaman*, quoting al-Sistani as telling a delegation of tribal leaders that power must rest with Iraqis and “not outsiders” (Bremer and Co.). The ad had reportedly been placed by tribal leaders.

The new statement proved to be embarrassing to Washington. As an AP wire put it: “Drafting a new plan to accommodate al-Sistani’s views would make Washington look like it is allowing its Iraq policies to be held hostage to the wishes of one man.”

Most important in this recent statement by the Shi’ite leader, is his hint that “new problems will arise,” if there are no elections, and “will only worsen the tensions in the political and security situation.” As one Lebanese strategist put it in discussion with *EIR*, the current situation in Iraq bears an eerie resemblance to that which obtained in the 1920s resistance against the British: At that time, the Shi’ites also adopted a negotiating posture; but, when it failed, they shifted to join the resistance. Today, al-Sistani is “halfway to joining the resistance. He and the rest of the Iraqis will not accept American rule of Iraq. There is no room for any compromise whatsoever,” he said.

Bremer et al. find themselves running into a stone wall, a fact they appear to have grasped; yet, they have no comprehension of the underlying reasons why they cannot simply dictate their solution. What they must have figured out by now, is that if they do not satisfy al-Sistani’s requirements, the Shi’ites could be mobilized into the resistance. One *fatwa* would do it.

A meeting among Annan, three IGC leaders, and representatives of the British and U.S. occupying forces in Iraq, is scheduled for Jan. 19. Following preparatory talks between Annan, U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Negroponte, and British Ambassador Emyr Jones-Parry on Jan. 9, UN spokesman Fred Eckard told the press: “Everyone wants to see a successful transition to sovereignty in Iraq, and everyone has

their thinking caps on as to the best way to do that. We are maintaining an open mind while we listen to whatever the Brits and Americans put forward to us. and we’re also listening to what the Iraqis are saying.”

Separatism in the North

On the northern front, the United States is finding that its Kurdish “partners” are driving a hard bargain. The two leading Kurdish parties—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)—who supported the U.S.-led invasion, are demanding that the autonomy they had enjoyed under Saddam Hussein, including a hefty share of the oil revenues, be maintained. Not only that: They have presented, through their five IGC members, a resolution calling for the city of Kirkuk to be included in a “historic Kurdistan” autonomous region of a federated Iraq. Both the Turkmen organizations inside and outside Iraq, as well as the Turkish government, have adamantly refused any such arrangement, threatening that, were a Kurdish entity to be proclaimed, a “Turkmen” entity would then emerge.

Syria also rejects any step towards Kurdish independence; this topic was high on the agenda of the talks which Syrian President Bashar al-Assad held with Turkish government leaders during his visit in early January. Referring to those talks, Assad told *CNN-Turk* on Jan. 5, “We are opposed, not only to a Kurdish state, but also to any action against the territorial integrity of Iraq. Iraq’s future is bound to the future of all of us. For that reason, the break-up of Iraq would be a red line, not only as far as Syria and Turkey are concerned, but for all the countries in the region.” He could have added, “emphatically Iran.”

That any concession to Kurdish ambitions will unleash ethnic strife, even civil war, is implied in the bloody clashes that have occurred in Kirkuk, between Arabs and Turkmen on the one side, and Kurds on the other. On New Year’s Eve, Kurdish militiamen from the *peshmergas* opened fire on a crowd of 3,000 demonstrators in Kirkuk, who were protesting the Kurdish parties’ resolution to take over the city, whose population is divided mainly between Arabs and Turkmen. On Jan. 2, Arab gunmen killed one Kurd and wounded another, after which there was a shoot-out with police, who killed two and wounded three. A statement from the Iraqi Turkmen Front denounced Kurdish ambitions, while a Eurasian Turkmen party threatened to proclaim an autonomous Turkmen entity.

IGC rotating chairman Pachachi advised the Kurds to cool down the situation, to prevent chaos. “We have accepted federalism in principle,” he said on Iraqi television Jan. 5, “but there are different forms of federalism in the world, and I cannot tell you for the moment what the final form will be in Iraq.” Pachachi’s legal advisor, Feisal Istrabadi, was more specific: “There is a substantial agreement that the status quo in the Kurdish region would be maintained during the transition period,” but “no one is conceding any ethnic or confes-

sional grounds as the basis for any future federal state.” Istrabadi explained the insanity of any such approach, by showing that ethnic and religious communities are not separated in Iraq. “You know what the largest Kurdish city in Iraq is?,” he asked provocatively. “It’s Baghdad. It isn’t like you could draw a line in Iraq and say the Kurds live here or the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, or the Turkomans or the Shi’ites or the Sunnis live there. In the supposedly Shi’ite south, there are a million Sunnis in Basra,” he said.

The ambitions of the PUK and KDP do not rest on any historical or ethnic fact; they are merely the expression of raw political-economic interests that the two parties’ leaderships, not known for their moral integrity, are pursuing. While some in the United States believed they could use the Kurds as their pawns in the war, then put them in their place in an American-controlled Iraq, the PUK and KDP leaders are threatening to turn into Frankenstein monsters, not only eluding the control of their creators, but turning against them.

Cheney’s New ‘Operation Phoenix’

The problems encountered with both the Shi’ites and the Kurds may help explain why Bremer shifted his position regarding the militias of the two groups. Whereas he had earlier cultivated the idea of merging the armed groups into an “anti-terrorist” force, in early January he reversed himself, and called for their disarmament. “In a unified Iraq there is no place for political parties having armed groups,” Bremer told reporters on Jan. 11. “We have never announced that the coalition was in favor of militia. We believe it is important for those militias that exist to be phased out as Iraq moves toward sovereignty,” Bremer said.

Instead of merging the militias, a new plan—this time concocted by Vice President Dick Cheney—was floated on Jan. 4, for an Iraqi secret police force. According to the London *Daily Telegraph*, the force would cost up to \$3 billion over the next three years, in money allocated from the same part of the Federal budget that finances the CIA. For recruits, it is to draw on elements in Iraqi exile groups, Kurdish and Shi’ite forces—in addition to former Mukhabarat agents who are now working for the Americans. The Mukhabarat was the notorious secret police organization under Saddam Hussein. CIA officers in Baghdad are expected to play a leading role in directing their operations.

A former United States intelligence officer familiar with the plan told the *Telegraph*, “If successfully set up, the group would work in tandem with American forces but would have its own structure and relative independence. It could be expected to be fairly ruthless in dealing with the remnants of Saddam.” The single force would be made up of 10,000 agents; its salaries would be paid by the CIA, which has 275 officers on the ground in Iraq. Vincent Cannistraro, a former chief of CIA counterterrorism, commented that the program looked like a new version of Operation Phoenix in Vietnam. “They’re clearly cooking up joint teams to do Phoenix-like

things, like they did in Vietnam.” Cannistraro said this would involve joint units of Iraqis and U.S. special forces, in covert operations.

John Pike, an anti-war critic associated with networks of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, added, “The presence of a powerful secret police, loyal to the Americans, will mean that the new Iraqi political regime will not stray outside the parameters that the U.S. wants to set. To begin with, the new Iraqi government will reign but not rule.”

That sums up quite accurately the overall aim of those in America and Britain who are struggling to appear to have an “exit strategy.” As British Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon made clear on Jan. 2, the plan is that *the troops will stay*. Hoon refused to “speculate about numbers,” and said he expected to see “the role of British forces change, subtly perhaps.” The British would, he went on, continue to provide security, but “instead of, in a sense, being legally an occupying power, we will be there in support of a transitional government, assisting that government on the way, we hope, towards democracy.” Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, while in Amman on Jan. 5, was more blunt, saying he “could not give an exact timetable” for troop withdrawal; “I can’t say whether it’s going to be 2006-2007,” Straw said, and suggested that a “status of forces agreement” would come into being with the Iraqis. It is “a fact,” he acknowledged, that the troops would stay, not for months, but “years.”

The same has been stated repeatedly by U.S. figures, who say that, following the elections projected for 2005, the new Iraqi “sovereign” government will “invite” the occupying forces to alter their status and name, but stay on to ensure security. Plans announced to build the biggest U.S. embassy in the world, a monstrous edifice in Baghdad to house 3,000 employees, speaks volumes. As Pike aptly put it, the Iraqis will “reign but not rule.”

No matter what new labels one tries to stick onto it, the Iraqi mess remains, and is getting messier, with casualties mounting as the resistance grows in size and capabilities. But were there any serious intention of a stable Iraq having a sovereign and legitimate government, the blueprint for doing so exists, and has been in discussion among Iraqis, and others, over the past months.

U.S. Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche’s Nov. 28, 2003 outline for an effective exit strategy, calls for the United States to announce its intention to withdraw and bring in the United Nations, as the only legitimate mediating agency by international law. He proposed that the 1958 republican Constitution of Iraq be restored, as the basis for a new Constitution, to be amended as required by a duly elected constituent assembly. Significantly, that historic document was based on the commitment to an independent sovereign nation, unifying all components. It stated: “Arabs and Kurds are considered partners in this Nation, and their national rights within the unity of Iraq are recognized by this Constitution.”