

# Bush Sets Up New Government in Iraq

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

June 30, the long-awaited date for the transfer of power from the US-led occupying forces to an Iraqi interim government, had become a symbol, at least in U.S. political iconography, for the restoration of sovereignty to Iraq and the advent of an era of peace, democracy, and freedom. But the harsh reality of a widening asymmetric guerrilla war against the occupation forced even the publicity-hungry Paul Bremer, outgoing head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, to abruptly alter plans, and effect the handover almost in secret, two days earlier than scheduled. After a short ceremony with about 30 people present, Bremer was whisked off to the airport. The fear had been that a high-profile ceremony could have been annihilated by a massive military attack, which could have killed more than the public relations effort.

As Bremer left, John Negroponte, the new U.S. ambassador to Iraq arrived, to take up his post at the U.S. embassy, which is slated to be the largest in the world. In the view expressed by Germany's leading Iraq expert, Aziz Alkazaz, (who gave an interview to *EIR* on June 29, to be published next week), this changing of the guard captured the essence of the matter. Sovereignty, he said, is nothing someone "gives" or "takes;" but it resides with the people. What occurred during the Baghdad ceremony was not a transfer of sovereignty, but rather, of certain authorities. So long as foreign troops remain on Iraqi soil, and are allowed to intervene militarily, even without the agreement of the interim government, "then one cannot speak of a real transfer of power," he said.

## Independence and Military Power

The most important thing for the majority of the Iraqi people is not the cosmetic appearance of democracy, free elections, etc., but national independence and true sovereignty. Thus, if there is to be peace in Iraq and the region, there must be a real (not cosmetic) change in U.S. policy. This means the United States must—as Lyndon LaRouche outlined in his LaRouche Doctrine—show a clear intention to end the occupation, and "build a completely different basis for a friendship and . . . possibly, later, even an equal partnership," said Alkazaz.

The new interim government installed by the occupying powers in Baghdad faces a tremendous challenge. The fact that its members collaborated with the occupation, even prior to the war, as exiles abroad, has discredited them in the eyes of the population. They have almost replaced the occupying forces as the primary targets of the resistance. Had the United

States given them any actual power during the occupation, then perhaps, in Alkazaz's view, they could have built up some popular support. But that was not the case. The real question to be answered now is: will they be allowed to wield that power, not symbolically, but in fact?

The decisive factor in Iraq, determining who has power, is not what is written on paper but what exists "on the ground" i.e., who retains military power. As matters now stand, the United States will remain, with its 135,000 troops (and more on the way) in addition to the 20,000 other foreign troops. Officially, the Iraqis have the right to ask the occupiers to leave, but, given the strength of the resistance, and the strong political ties of the interim government to the United States and U.K. (many of them carry American and British passports!), this is not likely.

Therefore, if there is to be hope for a "new" Iraq, it means that policy has to change radically, first in Washington, D.C. A complete "reversal" of the U.S. policy approach has to occur, in the view of Alkazaz, along the lines of LaRouche's vision of a regional strategic approach, which must include an American commitment to a two-state solution to overcome the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is no way one can talk of democracy, freedom, and market economy in Iraq, if Washington continues its blind support of Ariel Sharon.

This turnaround will entail not only the end of the occupation, in fact, and the withdrawal of troops, but the true transfer of decision-making powers to an Iraqi government. Questions regarding the role that religion should play in society, as in the constitution, must be left up to the Iraqis to determine. There can be no outside interference in matters pertaining to the culture and religion of the people, Alkazaz stressed. This is particularly the case, considering the abysmal lack of knowledge or understanding of these cultural and historical factors, on the part of the U.S. establishment and its plethora of thinktanks. If there is to be, some time in the future, a true peace between Iraq and the United States, then American political leaders must grasp the need to enter into the cultural mindset of the Iraqis, and Arabs more broadly.

## Reversing De-Ba'athification

Alkazaz believes that the problems facing Iraq can and must be solved by the Iraqis, without outside interference. One major step is reversal of the de-Ba'athification policy of Bremer, which had deprived hundreds of thousands of Iraqis of their jobs, dismantled the security and military, and destroyed the civil service structures. Bremer had ordered an estimated 30,000 top Ba'ath members to be fired, and had disbanded the security apparatus and army, which numbered together 750,000. Twenty-two of the oil ministry's 25 directors-general were replaced. "The country and the people," Alkazaz points out, "always identified with the army, on a basis of trust, due to the way the army related to them, and built up a political capital in the population. The army never betrayed the people, not under the monarchy, nor under the Republic. Why did they simply disband this capital?" he asks.

Re-establishing a truly national military force, under professional, patriotic leadership, is a must. Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi appears to have grasped this fact, and has announced his intention of reversing de-Ba'athification. In an interview with the Lebanese television channel, LBC, Allawi spoke of his own Ba'ath credentials. Recalling his participation in the 1968 Ba'athist coup, he presented himself as leading the true path of the party, while Saddam Hussein and "a handful" of followers were "a deviation." "A handful of straying and criminal people, led by Saddam, assumed power in Iraq, harmed the party and Iraq, and exploited the party, unfortunately, as a tool for repression," he said. "And this is why I forcefully confronted this deviation since that time and while I was still in Baghdad. I am honored to have confronted this deviation." He added that his "affiliation with the Ba'ath party" had given him important political experience.

At the swearing-in ceremony on June 29, Allawi, appearing against a backdrop of the old Iraqi flag, spoke of national reconciliation, and promised to halt the persecution and exclusion of Ba'athists. He argued that de-Ba'athification had "deprived government departments of their best technocrats, and triggered the collapse of an Iraqi state," according to remarks reported by the *Financial Times* on June 30. Five ministers in his interim government were middle-ranking Ba'athists before the war. Allawi promised to accelerate the re-integration of some 15,000 civil servants, give pensions to employees of the disbanded security forces and the disbanded information ministry. He is said to be considering an amnesty for Iraqis involved in the resistance.

## Revenge or Reconciliation?

If reversing de-Ba'athification is a precondition for restoring social harmony, and establishing a viable military for defense, meting out justice is as important. Here, the obvious case in point is the treatment of the "prisoners of war" whom the U.S. forces captured and have been holding. On June 30, former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, along with eleven other former leading members of the regime, including Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, were formally handed over to Iraqi custody. Like the transfer of power, this too was a cosmetic move: The Iraqis were given "legal" jurisdiction, but the U.S. armed forces would maintain physical control over the prisoners, in a U.S. military prison, for the obvious reason that the Iraqi interim government has no control over security.

Formal charges were read out to the detainees on July 1. Saddam Hussein was charged with killing religious figures in 1974; gassing Kurds in Halabja in 1988; killing the Kurdish Barzani clan in 1983; killing various political party members over three decades; displacing Kurds in the 1986-88 "Anfal" campaign; invading Kuwait in 1990; and, suppressing Kurdish and Shi'ite uprisings in 1991.

Both Allawi and the National Security advisor Mowaffak al-Rubaie spoke out in favor of restoring the death penalty, (which Bremer had suspended), and the prime minister also proposed declaring a state of martial law to deal with the

resistance. Designated President Ghazi al-Yawer announced that the new government had decided to reinstate the death penalty. Although George Bush, while at the NATO summit in Turkey, said he understood the need for martial law—and his support of the death penalty in Texas is legion—others immediately reacted with horror, not only that practices abhorred in the old regime were being revived, but that, in so doing, the new regime would effectively kill any chance for true justice to be served.

Aziz Alkazaz characterized the proposed restoration of the death penalty and martial law as “the greatest stupidity.” This would deal the final death blow to what remains of the moral justification which the United States claimed to have for its war. What is required is true justice, and, above all, a commitment to truth. His proposal is that the Iraqis follow the successful model of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission installed in post-apartheid South Africa. Bringing criminals to justice before a legitimate court, with full guarantees of a fair trial, is important; but to achieve justice, the entire truth must be heard.

As the situation now stands, no such guarantees are there.

The case of Saddam Hussein and the other prisoners is a case in point; during their captivity, they have had no access to lawyers or family, in violation of the Geneva Convention. A team of 20 lawyers, many from Jordan, which has been put together to defend Saddam Hussein, has not had access to the accused. The new Iraqi Special Tribunal which is to try them, was set up under the occupation last December, and is, therefore, utterly in violation of international law, which forbids an occupying force from establishing institutions. (By the same token, the current interim government is also illegal.) The “law” to be adopted by this tribunal, which is to be led by Salem Chalabi, a relative of the notorious neo-con puppet Ahmed Chalabi, is said to be a “combination” of Iraqi pre-war law, international law, and the procedures adopted at the Rwanda trials. These facts have already been challenged by defense lawyers, who charge that the changes made in the law were illegal, since no parliament or council was involved. They add that the appointment of judges has been politically motivated, and that all decisions pertaining to the justice apparatus were made under occupation.

Ziad al-Khasawneh, one of Saddam’s would-be defense attorneys, said in Amman, Jordan, that the defense team planned to go to Iraq but that Allawi’s government had not said whether it would provide security. “How can the defense team go to a country where it doesn’t enjoy any protection? They will kill us there,” he said. Another lawyer, Muhammad Rashdan, told BBC that he had received death threats, and was asking for international protection to be able to visit his client. Furthermore, the Iraqi Bar Association has to rule on whether to let the Jordanians in.

## The Truth Must Be Told

National security advisor al-Rubaie, stated confidently that the tribunal would be able to impose the death penalty.

Statements by him and other government member, point in the direction of a death sentence, long before any trial has been called. As for unearthing the truth, it appears from Al-Rubaie’s remarks that efforts will be exerted to prevent the truth from coming out. Al-Rubaie stated that Saddam Hussein would not be allowed to do what Slobodan Milosevic did, that is, to turn the trial into a political process. He specifically ruled out having high-level political witnesses called to testify, like President Bush or British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

In the case of the crimes of which Saddam Hussein is accused, be it the war against Iran, the invasion of Kuwait, or the use of chemical weapons, the role of high-level U.S. government officials at the time is crucial. The Iran-Iraq war was a population war organized by the likes of Henry Kissinger, with the aim of letting two oil-producing giants of the region destroy each other. The use of chemical weapons, if part of the accusations at trial, must open the question of where the weapons came from. It is documented that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was directly involved in arranging deliveries of weapons for use against Iran. As for the 1990 events, it was then-U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie who informed Saddam Hussein that her government considered the Iraq-Kuwait tensions as an internal affair of the two countries to deal with, thus giving the green light for the 1990 invasion.

If there is to be justice and national reconciliation; if there is to be a perspective for normal relations to be restored between Iraq and the West—even the United States—then the truth must be told and the consequences faced. Justice can only be justice for *all* those guilty of crimes.

Within Iraq itself, as Alkazaz has explained, the process of reconciliation can unfold, according to traditions and institutions which are part of the national heritage. Alkazaz speaks of a “Mithaq,” a “union of trust,” which the various groups in Iraq,—Shi’ites, Sunnis, Kurds, and Turkomen—will seal, a pact whereby they all swear never to fight one another, and to take all measures necessary to prevent civil war. Such a union of trust will also be built on the commitment to consider the resources of the country, its raw materials, in particular, as not belonging to any one group, or foreign interests, but as the property of the nation, to be used to generate revenues, in order to rebuild the industrial and human infrastructure, which has been destroyed in so many wars.