

# Iraqi Elections: Farce of the Century

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Registration for ex-patriate Iraqis to vote in the Iraq elections began on Monday in fourteen countries – Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Iran, Jordan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, and runs until January 23. However, according to a renowned expert on international law, Sabah Al Mukhtar, the London based President of the League of Arab Lawyers, the election is not alone fatally flawed, it is illegal.

‘Under the Vienna Convention, an occupying force has no right to change composition of occupied territories socially, culturally, educationally or politically. This election was based on the laws laid down by former ‘Viceroy’ American Paul Bremer and is entirely unconstitutional. Bremer personally appointed the overseers for the election’, says Al Mukhtar, thus, far from ‘free and fair’ and heralding Iraqi ‘democracy’ they are entirely engineered by Bush’s man.

Further, says Al Mukhtar the names of those standing for election are not widely publicized, many names are indeed unknown and little or no manifestos have been published. However, what is publicized are the names and addresses of all who register to vote, they are displayed – in Iraq and all voting centers abroad – at all polling centers. This is simply and purely ‘intimidation’ says Al Mukhtar, it will ‘encourage some and discourage others – disclosing names and addresses is highly dangerous, no one will be safe within or without polling stations, now or later’, he contends. Intimidation needs no encouragement. Nadia Selim, from Notholt, Middlesex recounts in the Independent how her family in Hay Al Jamia in west Baghdad a mixed Sunni and Shi’ite neighborhood were planning to vote in spite of the dangers – until they were visited by their local shopkeeper. He requested they hand over their ration books for ‘safe keeping’. The ration books are the means of identity for voters. Gunmen had visited him and ordered him to collect all ration books in the neighborhood. The family refused his request. Later he returned sobbing and begged them not to condemn his children to death, reluctantly they gave in. One can only speculate how widely similarly intimidating actions are being replicated throughout Iraq.

Further says Al Mukhtar no one knows who has drawn up the electoral lists and on what they are based. ‘I am an Iraqi and entitled to vote, but no one has contacted me.’ As a prominent and internationally well known Iraqi he can hardly have been overlooked one wonders how many other Iraqis who are hardly likely to have voted for puppet ‘Prime Minister’ Allawi and his gang have been similarly ‘overlooked’. Further, allegation of intimidation of Iraqi ex-patriates abroad seems to be borne out by the fact that of an estimated seventy thousand Iraqis living in the north of England, just three hundred and fifty have so far registered to vote, according the Chair of the Manchester based Iraq Solidarity Campaign Hussein Al Alak. A strange reluctance in some cities to hold the elections in public building also appears to

have crept in. Manchester Town Hall declined as a venue on the basis that there were too many weddings being held there on polling day. When the wily Al Alak checked, there was, in fact just one booked. 371 Oldham Road has now been designated in an area entirely dominated by the BNP. In Glasgow polling is inexplicably listed at two private houses, 71 Holland Street and 94 Elmbank Street.

Where the external votes will be counted and by whom and under what independent monitoring body is unannounced and unknown says Al Mukhtar. Further he adds that legally election must be 'possible, fair and reasonable' – none of which apply in the chaos of occupied Iraq where votes are also being bought and even Iyad Allawi – who recently tried to buy favors from journalists with hundred dollar bills in brown envelopes – is complaining of being intimidated in spite of being surrounded by US soldiers and tanks. Oh, and the only 'independent' monitoring of the elections within Iraq are being carried out from Jordan – twelve hundred kilometers away. No wonder Allawi has kept his British passport and his mansion in leafy Surrey as insurance.

Further, it is not, as widely reported, just the Sunnis who have boycotted the elections. The Iraq National Foundation Conference comprises of prominent Shi'ite, Sunni, Pan-Arabists and Marxists. They have turned their back on the whole process due to the absence of an international body to oversee the proceedings.

Further trouble in Paradise has broken out in the Jordanian capitol, Amman, between the International Organization for Migration – who control overseas voting on behalf of Out of Country Voters. The IOM has stated that Israelis of Iraqi origin are eligible to vote. Asma Khader, Jordan Government spokeswoman and Minister for Culture says Israel based Iraqis voting in Jordan is quite simply 'out of the question.' In Baghdad the Independent Electoral Commission's Farid Ayar also stated that those with Israeli papers would be barred from voting. Jordan is the nearest country designated as a voting point, to Israel. Further, looking at the list of countries where Iraqis can vote and the vastness of say, America, Canada and the US, many Iraqis will have to invest in an airline ticket to vote – even those resident in Ireland will have to travel to the UK.

Intimidation is not alone rife for voters, from Basra, Iraq's beautiful battered southern city, to Mosul in the north and at virtually every designated polling station in Iraq, electoral committees have fled in terror – in Mosul the entire seven hundred left – polling stations have been bombed, burned and officials murdered. In Allawi's Alice in Wonderland world, he has, he says, devised the most stringent security tactics to ensure safety on polling day. He'd be wise to implement them forthwith – if they exist.

To add to the joy of Iraqis liberated from electricity, clean water, largely too scared to venture out, they are also to become a nation of hostages for three days before and during polling day. Borders will be closed, phones disconnected, mobiles rendered useless – and US other forces already murderous and unaccountable will be able to run riot and spill blood at will with not the slightest chance of the world knowing in this four day suspension of any semblance of 'freedom and democracy.' Cars will not be allowed near any polling stations so even those prepared to risk queuing to be blown up will certainly not risk walking to do so. 'Possible, fair and reasonable' the elections are not. A farce of historic proportions they certainly are.

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