

Iraqi Elections Under Military Occupation: Canada Complicit in a Parody of Democracy

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Region: [Canada](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

The text of this declaration has been signed by more than 70 Quebec concerned citizens, antiwar activists, politicians, trade-union leaders, writers, artists and intellectuals. (See list below).

The declaration is endorsed by Quebec's antiwar movement: Collectif Échec à la guerre. It is also supported by the following organizations: l'aut journal, Avocats contre la guerre, Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), l'Entraide missionnaire, Option citoyenne, Union des forces progressistes (UFP), l'Union paysanne.

The text was drafted by Tiphaine Dickson, barrister specialized in international law, in collaboration with the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

(preliminary translation from French)

How can free and just elections be held when most of the candidates are unable to organize an election campaign? When entire populations are unable to vote? When the election itself serves first and foremost a US "agenda" of military takeover and control of an entire region.

The January 30 elections in Iraq – held under prevailing conditions of violence and US military occupation, not to mention the boycott of the Sunni community – have as their sole aim to grant a shaky legitimacy to the US military occupation and to justify the invasion of Iraq without the authorization of the Security Council of the United Nations.

Even though Canada was not a member of the Bush administration's "coalition of the willing", Ottawa is now supporting an "electoral process" which is neither "independent" nor the expression of Iraqi sovereignty. Canada is thus contributing to granting legitimacy not only to the act of aggression, but also to numerous pretexts and lies, not to mention the underlying disinformation campaign used to justify the war on Iraq.

In this way, Canada is complicit not only in the US war agenda, but also in a public relations campaign aimed at enhancing the image of the Bush administration in Iraq, which in spite of a bogus transfer of sovereignty to a "transitional" governmental body, nonetheless maintains some 150,000 occupation troops in this supposedly "sovereign" country.

Indeed, after Prime Minister Martin offered Canada's assistance to President Bush last April, and after the Bush-Martin meeting last December, Canada hosted on 19-20 December the so-called "Forum 04", a behind-closed-doors, supposedly "international" conference on the Iraqi elections. The outcome of this event was the creation of an International Mission on the

Iraqi elections, with Elections Canada playing the role of a key coordinating body. All the countries involved in this “observation” mission are members of the US sponsored coalition, with the exception of Canada, Mexico and Yemen.

Canadian involvement in Iraq has nothing to do with democracy or human rights. It aims, rather, to legitimize the structures imposed on Iraq under US military occupation. In this regard, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada, describes the function of election observation missions as follows: “The participation of an international body (in overseeing elections) plays a fundamental role in legitimizing, on different levels, the process of democratization or the consolidation of the democratic structure of the country in question.”

If indeed, according to Kingsley, this fundamental role is one of providing legitimacy, then what is being legitimized and justified, in the case of Iraq, is not democracy, but the criminal invasion and occupation of which the Iraqi people are the victims.

Thus, Iraq “wins”, in terms of “democracy”, what it has lost in human lives ([100,000, according to The Lancet](#)), not to mention the derogation of its national sovereignty and the destruction of an entire national infrastructure. Destroyed by coalition forces, this infrastructure is now slated to be selectively rebuilt, with billions of dollars accruing to US corporations under Iraq’s “post-war reconstruction”. Moreover, according to Kingsley, participation in an observation mission constitutes acknowledgement of the validity of an electoral process, and serves to confirm and communicate this message of “acknowledgement”.

“In other words, accepting an electoral mission is first of all acknowledging that the electoral exercise is legitimate, that the essential elements are present and that the objectives are feasible. This message of acknowledgement plays internationally as well as nationally, that is, among the local stakeholders.”

But the present electoral process in Iraq is illegitimate because it serves mainly US objectives, and because truly democratic objectives cannot be realized under the prevailing conditions of insecurity in Iraq which prevent people in many regions from voting. In addition, it is unacceptable to grant legitimacy to an invasion and an occupation which violate the fundamental principles, established half a century ago by the Nuremberg Tribunal, which qualify military aggression as the “supreme international crime”:

“To initiate a war of aggression, therefore is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

Regarding these “other war crimes”, for which “the democratic process” serves as a shaky alibi, with the complicity of Elections Canada and its partner in the observation mission, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, constitute the most serious crimes under international law. It is no coincidence that the IFES, deemed by Elections Canada to be “non-partisan” and “independent”, is financed and mandated by the American government, through USAID.

The American invasion of Iraq constitutes, first and foremost, a violation of the United Nations Charter, which formally forbids states to resort to force to resolve their differences. The occupation of Iraq has resulted in important violations of the Geneva Convention on the treatment of civilian populations, and of the Convention Against Torture in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison. Iraqis are thus the object of massive violations of their most fundamental rights on a daily basis. The US occupation in no way ensures the security of an oppressed and terrified civilian population.

Canada has no mandate, which allows it to legitimize, in any conceivable way, these crimes and violations of human rights in Iraq. Nor does the federal government, through Elections Canada, have the right to engage Canada in the validation of what constitutes an illegal and illegitimate US-led war. And since observation missions are powerful tools which are used to provide legitimacy, it is, therefore, not always advisable, according to Kingsley, to participate in such missions:

"This legitimization function is not unconditional, however. Thus, when the essential conditions of democracy are not present, starting with the holding of free and fair elections, you should refuse to participate in a mission or withdraw when these conditions are no longer met."

How can free and just elections be held when the majority of candidates are not even in a position to run an election campaign, and when large sectors of the population are not able to participate in the voting process?

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Diaspora in 14 foreign countries have the right to vote in the Iraqi elections under relatively "normal conditions", when those same rights are denied to the majority of Iraqi citizens living within their own country. What were dealing with is not only a two-tier system, but a dangerous precedent where national elections can now be held on foreign soil.

When the essential conditions of democracy are not present, the election itself serves first and foremost an American "agenda" of military domination of the entire Middle East region.

The International Mission for the election in Irak undoubtedly constitutes the most salient example of an observation mission, where "the essential conditions of democracy are not present". It also constitutes an example of Canadian foreign policy, which goes against the fundamental interests of the vast majority of the citizens of Canada and Quebec.

List of signatories

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