

Still under Occupation: Iraqi Election takes place

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Global Research, December 25, 2005

[Workers World](#) 25 December 2005

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

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Before discussing details about the Iraqi election, it's important to establish the most important facts: It was held during the military occupation of Iraq, with a curfew and limits on travel in place enforced by the U.S. and Iraqi puppet military. The most reactionary collaborationist forces controlled the election rules and counted the ballots, especially in the south and in the Kurdish regions of the northeast.

Most candidates, whether they meant it or not, promised that the election would be a step toward ending the occupation.

Apparently there was much greater vote participation throughout the central and northwestern parts of the country, where the resistance is strongest, than in the January "election" or the Oct. 15 referendum on the "constitution." While the U.S. government hailed this participation as a sign of a waning resistance, it is even more a sign that the best organized resistance forces consciously decided not to disrupt or threaten the election in what the imperialist media calls the "Sunni regions." There were relatively few attacks during the voting period.

Within days, resistance forces announced—and the media reported—a resumption of attacks, especially against U.S. troops, Iraqi puppet troops and police and Iraqi collaborators.

Within those same days, Iraqis from the Sunni-based National Concord Front protested over election fraud. "We reject these results announced by the commission," Adnan Al Dulaimi, one of the leaders of the National Concord Front, told a news conference Dec. 20.

The reactionary and collaborationist Islamic Supreme Council (SCIRI) and the Dawa party—Shiite religious parties strongest in Iraq's South—and the two major pro-occupation Kurdish parties in the North, came out on top in the new assembly, judging by early voting results. Altogether there were 200 charges of irregularities made against the election.

In the referendum on the constitution held in October, it was obvious that voting at least in Kurdish areas was fraudulent, with alleged vote totals sometimes outstripping the eligible voters. Only by fixing the vote in one province, Nineveh, that was expected to vote by more than two-thirds "No" in the referendum, could the authorities get the constitution approved.

Bush tries maneuver

The Bush administration did its best to give a positive spin to the election, scheduling a network television talk by George Bush and a speech in Baghdad by Dick Cheney on Dec. 18.

Bush admitted the reasons he gave for the war were false, but still tried to sell the project as worthwhile. It was the latest of a series of administration talks trying to win support for a “stay the course” policy in Iraq and to justify the original aggression, which had no legitimate excuse. From reactions to his talk, there were few signs he had convinced many people in the U.S. that somehow the U.S. situation in Iraq had improved.

Bush’s speech had even less effect in Iraq. As one Westerner living in Baghdad put it, “I was going to listen to Bush’s speech, but the electricity was out.” If anything depicts the failure of the U.S. occupation, it is its inability to get the Iraqi economy moving and to provide basic services for even a solid minority of the Iraqi population.

Cheney’s talk was even more of a disaster. His visit to Iraq was kept secret up to his arrival, and he spoke before hundreds of Marines, usually a sympathetic and disciplined audience. This time the rank-and-file Marines hit Cheney with tough questions about whether it was worthwhile staying in Iraq. When Cheney ended his speech with “these colors don’t run,” instead of getting cheers, he got no applause and one lone whistle.

Some analysts raised the possibility that among those participating in the election were civilian supporters of the resistance, much as Sinn Féin was a civilian party reflecting the positions of the Irish Republican Army. Publicly, the Baathist, nationalist and pro-communist resistance groups said they opposed participation in the election—even though they didn’t make armed attacks to disrupt it. These resistance forces distanced themselves from the National Concord Front and other civilian anti-occupation groups regarding the election.

The heavy turnout in the center of Iraq showed in itself that anti-occupation Iraqis voted in the election.

On Dec. 19, four days after the election, the U.S. occupiers freed from prison some 24 high Baathist officials—people guilty of no particular crime although some had been demonized by the U.S.’s war propaganda—after holding them for 30 months.

Among them were two women, Rihab Taha, a bioscientist, and Dr. Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash, a biotech researcher who was No. 39 on the U.S. list of the “most wanted fugitives” of the Hussein regime. Dr. Ammash is known to people in the anti-war movement worldwide for her work on the ravages of depleted uranium on the population of Iraq stemming from the 1991 U.S.-led bombardment and anti-tank actions.

The U.S. authorities gave no public reason for releasing these high-level Baathist figures at this particular time.

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