

US Using Iraqi Political Discord to Justify Continuance of Occupation

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As Iraqi national elections on March 7 approach, violence and political discord in the country have escalated dramatically.

On February 22, Gen. Ray Odierno, the top US commander in Iraq, [announced that](#) the US was preparing contingency plans to delay the withdrawal of all combat forces from Iraq if violence or political instability increases after the national elections scheduled for March 7.

There are approximately 96,000 US military personnel in Iraq. Under President Obama's current plan, which is a continuation of George W. Bush's policy in Iraq, the stated intention is to cut the number of US troops in Iraq to 50,000 by August 31.

The US government plans to keep at least 50,000 troops in Iraq indefinitely, as a so-called training force for Iraqi security forces.

On February 22 alone, the same day General Odierno [made his comments](#), at least 44 Iraqis and one US soldier were killed as attacks raged across Iraq. In one of the attacks, a female suicide bomber killed 22 people and wounded 33 others in an attack at the home of a police commissioner in Balad Ruz. In another, three mortar rounds struck the so-called Green Zone in Baghdad, wounding at least six people.

The attacks have drawn comparisons by Iraqi analysts to rampant attacks that occurred during the sectarian bloodshed that ravaged Iraq between 2006-2007.

On February 19, just days before Odierno made his comment about the possibility of ongoing violence slowing a US withdrawal, US Brig. Gen. Kevin Mangum warned that violence in Iraq could worsen as a result of the upcoming elections.

The elections have been seen as a pivotal point for the Obama administration, with the expectation that they would bring more political stability to Iraq, further enabling a US withdrawal.

Instead, thus far, they are having the opposite effect, as General Mangum suggested might happen.

"Will there be sectarian strife after the election?" [asked Mangum](#). "That's our biggest concern at this point."

Mangum, one of the senior military commanders in Iraq, warned that the period after Iraq's national vote may well be more dangerous than election day itself. Mangum's comments

show that the military could already expect Odierno's contingency plans of slowing the withdrawal to be a reality.

Meanwhile, Iraq's political process appears to already be in a state of breakdown largely fomented by current and formerly US-backed players.

Months of delays and growing calls for boycotts, along with actual boycotts of the election from candidates and groups recently banned from participating are fueling political discord that threatens to prevent any party from successfully forming a government in the wake of the elections.

One of Iraq's most prominent Sunni Parliamentarian's, Saleh al-Mutlaq of Iraq's National Dialogue Front, recently [decided to pull his party out of the elections and boycott](#) the vote, after being banned by the Accountability and Justice Committee for accusations of having affiliations with Iraq's dissolved Baath Party.

Mutlaq is protesting what he along with many Shia politicians call a "dirty tricks" campaign that he believes is masterminded by Iran that aims to secure power for a Shia government. Many analysts see his move as a reflection of the Sunni boycott of the 2005 Parliamentary elections that led to a large portion of Iraq's population being disenfranchised by the vote, and was viewed as a major contributor to the sectarian violence that followed.

Mutlaq's accusations gain credibility where Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is concerned.

The US government and corporate media prefer to focus on Iran's "meddling" in Iraq; yet, the key players responsible for most of the political discord in Iraq are US-installed and -backed men who have always had clear links to Tehran.

[Maliki is a case in point.](#)

Maliki was an Iraqi in exile in Tehran from 1982-1990, and then remained in Syria before returning to Iraq after the US invasion of 2003. Maliki worked as a political officer for the Dawa Party while in Syria, developing close ties with Hezbollah and Iran.

The Dawa party backed the Iranian Revolution, as well as backing Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during the Iran-Iraq War. The group continues to receive financial support from Tehran. Maliki is the secretary general of the Dawa Party.

In April 2006, then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her UK counterpart, Jack Straw, flew to Baghdad in order to replace then Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari with Nouri al-Maliki. There was no democratic process involved in the decision.

Another US-backed Iraqi ex-patriot with ties to Iran is Ahmed Chalabi.

Recently the US Ambassador to Iraq, Christopher Hill, along with General Odierno, referred to Chalabi as Tehran's leading agent in Iraq. Chalabi, who leads Iraq's Justice and Accountability Committee that has been banning certain candidates from the upcoming vote, was said to be "clearly influenced by Iran" last week by General Odierno.

Chalabi played a major role in providing the Bush administration with information it wanted in order to justify invading Iraq. He is responsible for having Mutlaq, along with hundreds of

other candidates, eliminated from the election on the mostly fraudulent grounds that they are or were loyalists of Saddam Hussein's Baath party.

Along with Sunni leaders, his targets also include secular nationalists, and the two most important candidates who have been banned are leading members of cross-sectarian alliances, which raises fears that Iraq could be drifting toward a Shiite autocracy.

Another leading Sunni political party, the Iraqi Islamic Party, blames the US for opening the door to "Iranian influence" in Iraq, as well as for the National Dialogue Front's (NDF) decision to boycott the March polls.

"We in the Iraqi Islamic Party are surprised to read statements from the US regarding the negative Iranian interference in internal Iraqi affairs," the party said in a February 22 statement, expressing its "sorrow" over the NDF's decision to boycott.

"We ask: Who made Iraqi land an open theatre for regional and international interference? Who is legally and ethically responsible for the violations of Iraq?," [said the group's statement](#).

Threats and accusations are being hurled by the Iraqi government as well as the opposition.

On February 20, [As-Sabah news reported](#) that Maliki has claimed external money is being introduced to Iraq in order to change the result of the upcoming elections.

On February 21, the [Al-Jarida newspaper reported](#) that Mutlaq gave this as a reason for his decision to boycott the elections: "Following the statements made yesterday by the commander of the American troops in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, and those of US Ambassador to Baghdad Christopher Hill, I believe that the Justice and Accountability Committee is run by foreign sides, namely Al-Quds force in Tehran. Therefore, the Dialogue Front has announced its boycotting of the elections."

The Quds Force is a special unit of Iran's Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution. The Quds has been described as a group whose primary mission is to organize, train, equip and fund foreign Islamic revolutionary movements, and they report directly to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

As a result of all of this, international observers of the upcoming elections in Iraq have lowered their expectations for the poll. Few diplomats in Baghdad now talk of "free and fair elections." Instead, the new publicly stated goal is to have a "credible election"; yet, even that seems doubtful at this point.

On February 23, the Al-Arab newspaper carried an opinion piece by Fadel al-Rubaie. "Political observers are assuring that the post-elections stage will be much more dangerous than the current one (pre-elections) because the conflict will erupt between the different powers and on more than one front," [wrote Rubaie](#) before he went on to discuss much of the aforementioned political machinations between the candidates and parties.

For these reasons, as well as other volatile issues like Kurdish control of Kirkuk in the north and the issue of federalism in Iraq, Rubaie's conclusion is ominous: "For all those reasons, it would be delusional to say that the magical solution to Iraq's predicament resides in the elections, since quite the contrary, these elections could open the gates of hell."

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