

**The New UN Resolution on Iraq –  
Breakthrough?**

**James S. Henry**

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**Y**esterday the **UN Security Council** voted unanimously to approve a resolution with regard to Iraq. This action is already being positioned by Bush, Blair, and some journalists as a **legitimation** of the 160,000 Coalition forces in Iraq, and a sea change in the international community's attitude toward the war. We need to examine this closely, to see whether it really is a turning point, a **capitulation** by the hard-pressed Bush to important UN demands, or just another example of the UN's inability to accomplish much on this issue other than to **"follow the US or get out of the way."**

**SOVEREIGNTY?**

**To** begin with, the resolution endorses President Bush's June 30th deadline for the transfer of "full responsibility and authority" to the "sovereign" Interim Government of Iraq.

The UN resolution also notes that on June 30, control over accumulated profits from oil sales and the UN's "oil for food" program will be transferred to the interim Iraqi government. Of course, given the high costs of security and recent constraints on production and exports, oil profits have been relatively modest. As for the UN oil for food program, it is almost extinct, with key former administrators under investigation for corruption. For the foreseeable future, therefore, the interim Iraqi Government is likely to remain heavily dependent on aid from the US Government, which is still sitting on more than \$18 billion that was supposed to have been spent on infrastructure, and on relief from Iraq's \$130 billion foreign debt.

Furthermore, the new "sovereign" government is also instructed to "refrain from taking any actions affecting Iraq's destiny beyond its interim period of governance."

Presumably this rules out privatizing oil assets. One hopes that it doesn't also prevent the interim government from challenging US plans to build 14 new military bases all over the country, or from revising the **extraordinary neoliberal provisions in the country's new laws** on investment, trade, privatization, and taxes.

These were drafted by **Paul Bremer's** staff (including McKinsey veteran and Greenwich-based venture capitalist **Tom Foley**) and adopted by the Iraqi Governing Council and the CPA without any significant debate. They include some of the most extreme "free market" provisions in the developing world -- 2 percent import duties, wide open capital markets, and a maximum 15 percent income tax rate. **Russia**, which already tried an experiment with such measures in the early 1990s, should **volunteer to give the new interim Iraqi government some free advice about the effects of such measures.**



### **AN END TO OCCUPATION?**

The UN resolution also declares the "end of the occupation" and the authority of the US-led **Coalition Provisional Authority** as of June 30th. On the other hand, it also recognizes the mandate of the **"multinational force" (MNF) currently in Iraq at the request of the interim Government (sic)** to "take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability."



**President Bush: "Chirac? I have one for you. How many Frenchmen does it take to rebuild Iraq? Give up? None! Get it? HA HA HA HA!"**

In exercising this broad mandate, the MNF is requested to **"work in partnership"** with the new "sovereign" Iraqi Government. The request from France and Spain that the MNF report to the Iraqis was turned down.

Nor is there any attempt to create a UN peacekeeping force, other than a **"small" (4,000 person!)** force to protect UN workers themselves. (How many UN workers will there be, exactly?) Apart from the US and the UK, none of the other Security Council members are yet prepared to commit their own troops to joining the MNF in this adventure -- despite

their newfound enthusiasm for Bush's plans.

The UN promises to review this MNF mandate in one year. It also assures us that if the Iraqi Government wants the UN to terminate the MNF's mandate to be in Iraq, it only has to ask. Of course the US will then promptly withdraw all its troops from Iraq, **because, after all, we only invaded the country....with....uh...firm...uh...UN...authorization?**

That kind of request might conceivably occur under some hypothetical future Iraqi government. But the UN knows full well that at the moment, this "right to demand withdrawal" business is pure cosmetics -- the Tigris- Euphrates will freeze in summertime and all looters will leave Baghdad before such a request is made by the interim government of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

This rising star and **secular Shiite** was not a London brain surgeon for nothing. He is also a leading Chalabi rival, Iraqi National Accord leader, and early Baath Party member who was hand-picked by the now-defunct Iraqi Governing Council, with Paul Bremer's backing.

Allawi, who is reported to have **spied for the Baathist Party in London** before he turned against Saddam in the 1980s, has a long history of cooperation with US and UK intelligence agencies, as well as with disgruntled senior Iraqi Army officers. Allawi has become the agencies' preferred alternative to Chalabi -- a talented administrator who represents **"the acceptable face" of Baathism**, and has **none of Chalabi's wierd connections with the Iranians, busted Jordanian banks, or the insufferable Richard Pearl**.

It is far too early to say whether or not Allawi will be able to leverage his "transitional" role into a more permanent one, or even live to see the fall, but he and his numerous relatives -- some of whom are married to Chalabi's relatives -- are more likely to ask for increased MNF troops than to ask them to withdraw.

The UN resolution does recognize that Iraqi security forces will, at least technically, report to the Iraqi Government rather than to the MNF. This provision may help Allawi restore more control to his friends in the Iraqi Army. But since they will **continue to derive most of their payroll, training, arms and ammunition from the Coalition** for the foreseeable future, it is unclear how much practical difference this really makes.

Unless the MNF is booted out by a successor Iraqi Government, according to the UN resolution, its mandate is scheduled to expire "on completion of the political process outlined above." Optimists may read this to mean "by December 31, 2005." But that assumes that this "process" will stay on track. **We have all seen in the last 14 months just how accurate such forecasts have been with respect to Iraqi politics -- for example, the abortive effort to "write a constitution by March 2004."** Bearing this in mind, the UN resolution was careful not to specify an explicit date for MNF withdrawal.

### **THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY?**

The UN resolution also endorses a rather convoluted timetable for the creation of representative government in Iraq -- the broad contours of which can only be described as "Floridian," in terms of the efforts being made to control the exercise of democratic choice as much as possible, even while making loud noises in favor of it.

- The process begins with a **"national conference reflecting the diversity of Iraqi society."** How a conference can do that without being democratically elected is **a puzzle that evidently the UN has solved**, since it will help to organize and convene this conference in July 2004.

That conference, in turn, will select a **"Consultative Council"** of 100 members, which will "advise" the Interim Government and have "veto power over its orders." Precisely how this Council, which has just been added to the stew, will exercise this potentially very important power over Allawi and his team, is unclear -- **remember, folks, we are making this up as we go along.**

- With the UN's help and the Consultative Council's "advice," the Interim Government will then hold "direct democratic" elections for a **"Transitional National Assembly"** by the end of 2004, or January 31, 2005 at the latest. This is the UN, remember; one-month variations in schedules fall like raindrops from the sky.
- This Transitional National Assembly, in turn, will establish a **"Transitional National Government,"** which would take charge of drafting a **"permanent constitution."**

Presumably the Consultative Council will by then have faded away, along with the interim Iraqi government and the Iraqi Governing Council before it. Iraq

may be setting something of a record here for prophylactic appointed governmental bodies, designed to **sharply slow the rate of descent to that point where ordinary people actually get to vote. (The so-called "non-Florida point.")**

- Finally, on the basis of the yet-to-be drafted constitution, a "constitutionally-elected government" will finally be elected by the Iraqi people themselves by December 31, 2005. Or perhaps by January 31, 2006; who knows?

### **What are ordinary Iraqis likely to make of this "timetable?"**

First, they've already had more than 14 months of "interim" rule by people who were basically appointed by foreigners, and many of them evidently have some very strong opinions about the results.

Now they are being told that they will basically continue to be governed by recycled ex-Baathist exiles and military men, also chosen by foreigners, for at least another seven months.

Furthermore, these appointees will also now be in charge of the Iraqi military. In a country where government is commonly viewed, with strong historical justification, as a private fiefdom that is populated by a gang of thieves, this is unlikely to encourage people to believe in the UN's roadmap.

Finally, they are also being told that even when they do finally get to vote for the first time, by say January 2005, they will only be electing yet another "transitional" government, on the way to a constitutional convention and yet another new government the following year.

In short, even if everything goes according to plan, this political timetable requires ordinary Iraqis -- many of whom are still unemployed, and most of whom are already incredibly angry at how the US has mismanaged Saddam's overthrow -- to have extraordinary patience and to suspend an extraordinary amount of disbelief.

But we've already seen how difficult it was to achieve agreement on an overall national constitution this year. **My humble conjecture is that that difficulty was not due to a shortage of UN advice, consultative councils, or Security Council resolutions.**

Rather, it reflected very real, deep-seated divisions of views, interests, and affiliations within Iraqi society. These divisions may never be overcome, or they might be overcome by a bold experiment in de-occupation, liberation, and democratization. But they are unlikely to be overcome by the slow-motion, controlled kind of pseudo-democratization that the UN, in its wisdom, has just endorsed.

We should not really be surprised, therefore, if the roadmap just outlined produce even greater resistance against the occupation, rather than peace and quiet.

## **SUMMARY**

**A**fter more than a year of grossly mismanaging Iraq's transition to democracy, and more than **eight decades** of pushing the country toward autocracy, the reluctance of today's "Great Powers" to put an end to this custodial occupation and proceed more expeditiously with a bold experiment in **"ASAP" local democracy** is discouraging.

Yet to our senior leaders, and, indeed, many journalists, victory, suitably redefined, is once more just around the corner.

Of course we never found those WMDs or the links to al-Qaeda, we were not welcomed as liberators, and a majority of Iraqis want us to leave the way we came in --quickly. But the idea now is that, with the UN solidly in our corner, and more and more troops on the ground, we really will be able to (1) stabilize the country; (2) hold more or less free elections; (3) make sure that the winners are friendly moderates; (4) hang on to our precious military bases; and of course (5) minimize US casualties.

Over the next few months, I fear that a great many more lives will be wasted as we wait to once again to find out whether this latest theory is true.



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