

Who Should Decide Iraq's Future - The U.S. Government or the Iraqi People?

The U.S. attack against the people of Iraq is becoming imminent. The plans for the invasion and occupation of Iraq have been prepared. According to the *N.Y. Times*, these plans include U.S. military presence in Iraq for at least 18 months, military trials of the top Iraqi leadership, and quick control of the oil fields to pay for cost of invasion and reconstruction. A more than 250,000-strong military force has been assembled, the military headquarters of the U.S. war machine has been established in the region, and the U.S. military commander for Iraq after Saddam has been chosen. The campaign of "shock and awe" is about to begin.

The cost of invasion and reconstruction of bombed cities, bridges, factories, power stations, water supplies, and in short the entire Iraqi society is to be funded from the pockets of the people of Iraq by selling Iraqi oil. The U.S. is about to impose a destructive and bloody war on the people of Iraq in pursuit of its strategic and military interests. "Doctors without Borders" estimates that in the initial phase of the attack at least 50,000-150,000 civilians will be killed. The outcome of this aggression will change the face of the region.

The U.S. administration tells us that the invasion and occupation of Iraq is, among other factors, about liberating Iraq and defending Iraqi people's rights, and establishing democracy in Iraq and the whole Middle East. In this regard, the U.S. administration has assembled a group of Iraqi opposition figures and groups to be responsible for all marginal matters of running the country, under the direct supervision of the U.S. military, as the occupying power, and under the orders of the U.S. military commander. These opposition figures and groups are warlords, tribal leaders, reactionary mullahs and religious figures, Arab and Kurdish nationalists, Saddam's former military commanders and security officials, CIA supported and financed personalities, thugs, thieves, and murderers. None of them have ever been elected or represent the people of Iraq and their wishes. They all have one thing in common: their opposition to the freedom and welfare of the Iraqi people. The majority of this assembly, which was recently brought together by the U.S. State Department in London and Iraq's Kurdistan, consists of fundamentalist and Islamist figures. After so many years of suffering under Saddam's regime, the Iraqi people may now have to deal with Kurdish nationalist and fundamentalist Islamic groups. The State Department's Future of Iraq Project now has 17 technical committees to lay the groundwork for a transitional government (*Chicago Tribune*, 2/9/03), and to serve as consultants to the U.S. military ruler of Iraq.

It has been years that the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein has been the desire of the people of Iraq and the freedom-loving people of the region and the world. The issue is not just the downfall of the brutal Baath regime of Saddam, but also how and by whom it takes place, as well as what replaces this regime. The overthrow of the regime in Iraq is the job of the people of Iraq. It is the task of a social movement to rid Iraq of this inhumane situation.

The U.S. administration's attempt to impose a government contrary to the wishes of the people will prevent their political participation and will strictly limit political freedom. The right of the Iraqi people to decide their future government must be preserved and guaranteed. If the world community wants to play a constructive and positive role in Iraq, they must declare and secure the most basic and undeniable rights of the Iraqi people and their social and political freedoms. These basic rights and freedoms include:

- Unconditional freedom of thought, expression, press, association, organization, political affiliation, and strike.
- Complete and unconditional equality of women and men in civil and individual rights, and abolition of all laws and regulations that contravene this principle.
- Equality of all citizens irrespective of gender, religion, nationality, race, and citizenship.
- Freedom of all political prisoners
- Declaration of Iraq as a country that will not be divided along the ethnic and nationalist lines.
- Separation of religion from the state and education.
- General access to state media and mass communication for all, in particular political parties and groups.

To establish the prerequisites and the possibility for free and safe political participation in society and for people to be able to determine their preferred government freely and consciously, these basic rights must be declared and realized. For a society such as Iraq, which has been under dictatorship and political oppression for so long and which has experienced bitter and bloody wars and massive economic sanctions, the establishment of such rights has profound significance. The people of Iraq have never had any opportunity to participate in the political life of society and choose the governing system in a free and secure environment. It is, therefore, imperative for these basic rights to be established as an undeniable and clear standard in society. Declaration and realization of these rights will not allow for another system to be imposed on the Iraqi people once again, jeopardizing people's lives and pushing their society toward disintegration and ethnic and religious cleansing.