

Likely Iraq Scenario: What Could Be Better?

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By Hugh Fitzgerald (April 2006)

The minute Saddam Hussein was overthrown, a civil war became inevitable. This is something that the Bush Administration could not understand. Failing to understand Islam, and failing to understand Iraq, the members of that administration expected that the relief of everyone in Iraq at the removal of the murdering despot would be exhibited not only in gratitude, unfeigned and long-lasting, toward the Americans who did what no one else could or would do, but in a commitment to a new, liberated, free and unified Iraq. Recent documents show that Bush believed that sectarian strife was unlikely. It is curious that he felt able to do so, for there is no evidence that until recently he, or other members of his Administration, quite know what the history of Sunni-Shi'a relations are, or even how these versions of Islam matter. One suspects that the long history, going back to the earliest years of Islam, that divide Sunni from Shi'a, and that cause some of the former not only to treat the latter with contumely, but even to regard them as Infidels, "Rafidite dogs," was and is something that the Administration is not keenly aware of, just as it may not be sufficiently aware of the past history and present state, of Sunni-Shi'a relations in eastern Saudi Arabia, in Yemen, in Bahrain, in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, and in Lebanon. How could they? What time did they allow themselves to read up on Islam, to learn to distinguish the apologists from the experts, to figure out what Iraq was all about (and hence what could be expected, and what could be exploited), and what Islam was all about (which would have put a prompt end to that idiotic phrase "war on terrorism").

The belief that after the removal of the state terror that Saddam Hussein and his retinue had imposed, Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, and Arabs and Kurds, would all get along in Rodney-King-dream fashion, was crazy. During al-

Anfal, when 182,000 Kurds were killed, there was no outcry from Arabs outside Iraq (see Kanan Makiya) and not inside Iraq either. For whom do you think did the actual killing? Saddam Hussein and few dozen of his supporters? It was Arab forces, and they did not hesitate, and no Arab at the time appeared to think the Kurds deserved any better. Arabs in the main did not mind when Saddam Hussein killed.

Nor did the Sunni Arabs fault Saddam Hussein for persecuting or discriminating against Shi'a, or mass-murdering them either. What was more their concern was that the beneficiaries of the regime were few, and that Uday and Qusay, for example, were just as likely to kidnap, rape, and then kill a Sunni Arab girl as a non-Sunni. And too many of the Sunnis benefiting were from Tikri. But Sunni Arab indignation, inside Iraq, at treatment of Kurds and Shi'a? And outside Iraq? In both cases, hardly visible, nearly non-existent.

The Sunni Arabs constitute 19% of the population. Because of the habit of mental submission that Islam encourages, conspiracy theories, rumors, all kinds of craziness, are most attractive and while, in Infidel lands, where 5-10% of the population may be susceptible, in Muslim countries it may only be 5-10% of the country that is not susceptible. In such an atmosphere, the Sunnis have clung to the belief – the real belief – that they constitute not 19% but 42% or more of the population. It's all a conspiracy, you see, by the "American-backed" Shi'a to transfer power to the supposedly more pliable Shi'a. Nonsense, but believed.

And the Sunnis will not give up power willingly, as under any system of vote-counting (Bush wants to dignify this as "democracy" though that word ordinarily implies, in the Western world, all sorts of other things, including legal rights and mechanisms, distinctly absent in Iraq) they would have to. And besides, the Shi'a are inferior Muslims, and to the Zargawi school of thought, "Rafidite dogs," the worst of Infidels.

In the topsy-turvy world of Islam, it is possible that now the Shi'a will decide that they want the Americans to leave, because only then will they be able to deal with the Sunnis with the complete ruthlessness that they

wish to exhibit. And the Sunnis now must be rethinking their desire to see the Americans leave, for they must realize that as the Americans leave, the Shi'a will, beginning in the south, start eliminating, in Muslim fashion that has nothing to do with Infidel-imposed rules of combat, the Sunnis there, and then proceed all the way to Baghdad.

There is an alternative explanation to the one I have given. I claim the Bush Administration did not understand Islam and Iraq. Some of its critics may wish to prolong the misunderstanding by all of us, and to pretend that things could have been different "if only" the Administration had done this, or not done that. It's nonsense.

Everyone was at fault. The Republicans, and the Democrats. There was a failure all way round.

And there still is.

One waits, and waits, and waits for someone to say that the folly of American plans, the folly of the Light-Unto-the-Muslim-Nations project, is that we have failed to understand the main nature of the problem, are diverting our attention from, and limiting our freedom to maneuver in, both Iran and Europe. The former requires the use of military force, to destroy or greatly damage its nuclear facilities. The latter requires ideological warfare, of the kind used during the late 1940s and 1950s, to resurrect the Atlantic Alliance, and to support those who realize that Da'wa and demographic conquest are not fantasies from some fervid imagination. The fantasists are those who deny the problem, who belittle it, who are sure that somehow "things will come right."

Civil war could have been avoided only if the Sunnis had gracefully accepted their new status, one that befits their new position. Had their leaders, whether imams or "elder statesman"(I use this word comically) such as Adnan Pachachi, from the start recognized that a new master in Iraq, one resentful of its treatment in the past and holding all the cards, had appeared, then just possibly that war would have been averted.

Otherwise, given the Sunni Arab behavior in the past and the present, it

became inevitable. And what will also be inevitable is that this internal Iran-Iraq war, at whatever level, will attract the attention and worry of Shi'a and Sunnis outside Iraq. Some may send money or military equipment. Volunteers, and also "volunteers," may arrive, from Saudi Arabia, or Jordan, or Egypt, to smite the "Rafidite dogs" so many of whom seem too well-disposed to Iran. From the Islamic Republic of Iran will come (have already come) agents with all kinds of ideas as to how to defend the Shi'a. Ideally this could use up men, money, materiel, from all over the Islamic world. And it could lead to more violence against Shi'a in Pakistan, between Shi'a and Sunnis in Yemen, to Shi'a agitating in al-Hasa province in Saudi Arabia, and even to Hezbollah members moving from Lebanon through Syria and Jordan into Iraq, to see that justice is done, much to the relief of Lebanon's Christians and its wary Sunnis.

What could be better?

Apparently, what could be better, from the standpoint of many American political figures, is that "civil war" be avoided at all costs, by the Americans who will be there to make sure that things do not get out of hand.

What could be sillier?