

## Sovereignty Now

by [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Jun 18, 2004

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



#### [Dennis Ross \(/experts/dennis-ross\)](#)

Dennis Ross, a former special assistant to President Barack Obama, is the counselor and William Davidson Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute.

---



#### Articles & Testimony

**T**here have been several positive developments in Iraq in the past several weeks:

An interim government was formed and the largely discredited Iraqi Governing Council was disbanded.

The U.N. Security Council unanimously embraced the new Iraqi government and declared that it should be sovereign even on security matters.

After months of putative Iraqi leaders distancing themselves from us, the new prime minister, Iyad Allawi, and president, Ghazi al-Yawer, publicly thanked the United States for what it had done.

Are we now on the path to success in Iraq?

The short answer is we don't yet know. What we do know is that the challenge before us is enormously difficult.

Start with an Iraqi public that has largely turned against the U.S. presence. Wars against insurgencies cannot be won when the indigenous population is either actively hostile to the outside power or passively supportive of the insurgents. Our problem is that most Iraqis -- as revealed in the polls -- are more opposed to the U.S. presence than they are to those who are trying to force us out.

Does that mean all is lost? No, but we run that risk if we cannot change the Iraqi image of us, and soon. While there are many reasons for our predicament -- not the least of which was not being sufficiently concerned with establishing security in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's fall and denying that we faced a genuine insurgency -- our task now is to recognize that our success depends on creating an Iraqi sense of ownership for what is at stake.

This will not be done with words or declarations. On the contrary, there must be demonstrations of sovereignty, not pronouncements about it. Iraqis will look for unmistakable signs of Iraqi control at the handover of power June 30, when the problem will be very difficult.

The insurgents will do all they can to prove that the occupation isn't over and that the United States continues to pull the strings and to make all the key decisions. To discredit the interim government, the insurgents will increase the violence to prove that Mr. Allawi and his Cabinet are ineffective and control very little of significance.

The end of the Coalition Provisional Authority might be welcome to most Iraqis, but so long as there is a sizable U.S.

and coalition military presence and it is regarded as being responsible for security, there will be doubt that much has changed.

Unfortunately, the Iraqi government will be in no position to provide security for the country anytime soon. Nonetheless, from the outset, we must make sure that there are sufficient Iraqi forces capable of providing for the personal security of the government. Our training and support must be geared toward this urgent task. Nothing would discredit the new leaders more quickly than the image that they are completely dependent on the U.S. military, including for their personal security.

There must be demonstrations that the government is able to veto what the U.S. commander may want to do. Having a de facto veto is not sufficient. Mr. Allawi must be able to point to decisions he has made to stop certain operations or to alter U.S. military behavior.

Only in this way can the new government prove it is calling the shots. Ironically, it is as much in U.S. interests as theirs for Mr. Allawi and his colleagues to demonstrate this capability. They need it for purposes of credibility, while we need it to show we are carrying out the will of the Iraqi government, not the reverse.

This will mean the government is assuming responsibility for what our forces do. While Mr. Allawi may prefer to preserve some distance from certain operations -- reserving the possibility of criticizing some of our actions -- such a posture would be self-defeating in the end. They need credibility -- not demonstrations of impotence -- and we need Iraqi sanction for what we do.

Words alone won't be enough. The Iraqi government must be seen as delivering on security, and there is no substitute for that. But in the meantime, the issue of elections is something that we could use to shift the balance of psychological forces in the country.

Today, most Iraqis seem to agree on two key points: that we are occupiers and that elections are essential. Indeed, roughly 85 percent of Iraqis in polls are in favor of elections. This reflects not only the desire of the Shiites to have elections that will give them their due as a majority of the Iraqi population but also a deeper willingness of all groups in the country to fashion a new day; elections have become the symbol of that, in their eyes.

Elections are to be held for a transitional National Assembly no later than Jan. 31, 2005. Why not take the Iraqi desire for elections and show that U.S. forces are an enabler, not an impediment, to them? Why not have a rolling set of elections starting this fall? Why not declare -- or, better yet, have the new Iraqi government declare -- that wherever the environment is secure enough for elections, they will be held before the end of the year?

Certainly, this could be true in the Kurdish region, some of the Shiite areas and even some of the Sunni areas in Mosul, Kirkuk and Baghdad. Rather than appearing as if the United States is delaying what Iraqis want, the onus could be put squarely on the insurgents, who would be demonstrating for Iraqis to see that they are the ones blocking the Iraqi people from expressing their will.

There should be no illusions. Even if the new Iraqi government is viewed as asserting control and there are rolling elections, our challenge in Iraq will not be easy. But June 30 represents both an opportunity and a danger, and our prospects for the future depend on Iraqis believing that they are acquiring sovereignty -- and not in name only.

Dennis Ross is the Ziegler distinguished fellow and director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. ❖

Baltimore Sun

---

## RECOMMENDED

---

### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Grant Rumley

[\(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations\)](/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



### ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

#### [How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya

[\(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria\)](/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



### BRIEF ANALYSIS

#### [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson

[\(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy\)](/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

### TOPICS

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](/policy-analysis/us-policy)

### REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iraq \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](/policy-analysis/iraq)