

Removing Saddam: The Iraqi Opposition's Program

Oct 29, 1999



Brief Analysis

Shaykh Mohammed Mohammed Ali: Our strategy is to end the dictatorship of Saddam Husayn; we intend to rebuild our country democratically. Inside Iraq there is real discontent, and in the South, there is real resistance.

Sharif Ali bin al-Hussein: No secret formula exists for bringing down the regime. It could come to an end by any of several means, such as assassination, military coup, or popular insurrection. To the extent that one can make such a forecast, the most likely scenario is that the regime will bring itself down. It is already far down this path. Many in the regime want to leave because they are fed up with the terror, which the regime often turns against its own officials.

The tools and the will to overthrow the regime do exist; what remains lacking is the organization and leadership. The Iraqi National Congress (INC) needs to show brave Iraqis that the resistance they mount will not be in vain. We will act on a broad front, using diplomatic pressure, spreading the message of opposition inside Iraq, and getting other countries to recognize that there is an alternative to Saddam.

Salah al-Shaikhly: There has been much talk about what assistance the United States will provide the INC. Arms are not the main issue; if we want weapons, we can buy them in Baghdad where they are readily available. More important is obtaining what the U.S. government calls "nonlethal" equipment--logistical equipment that will help us organize and communicate more effectively. It is in this context that we should evaluate the release last week of \$5 million in aid under the Iraqi Liberation Act; \$3 million will go to training and \$2 million will be for nonlethal equipment.

If the demise of the regime cannot be accomplished in one fell swoop, then it must be done gradually. One step we are already taking is to circumscribe the movements of Saddam's officials, keeping them in the prison they have created for themselves. We chased the vice chairman of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council, 'Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, out of Vienna by threatening him with indictment for his crimes against the Iraqi people. Likewise, we prevented Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz from traveling to Rome by threatening legal action. We will push to indict Saddam and his regime.

Although military details cannot be openly discussed, this does not mean they do not exist. We are not sitting passively waiting for someone to arm us.

International Support

Shaykh Mohammed Ali: The INC expects the international community to support us in this struggle, and we hope this support will begin with the Arab and Muslim world. We have been looking to remove Saddam from power for more than twenty years. At a time when the United States supported Saddam and provided him arms, we were working for Saddam's overthrow. Now, times have changed, and the United States is with us in our struggle, which we welcome.

Al-Shaikhly: The Arab world should stand with the Iraqi people and not with Saddam's repressive regime.

Unfortunately, the Arab media have taken a hostile stand against the Iraqi people. Iraqis have supported every Arab liberation movement over the years, and they now want other Arabs to support Iraq's liberation. It is incumbent on the Arab media to support and report on the struggle of the Iraqi people. It is high time for the media to cease being subservient to Saddam by spreading his propaganda. The INC appeals for vigorous support to the countries that have suffered from Saddam's aggression.

We are proud to be working with Washington. It has come to the assistance of the Iraqi people, and we have gratefully received what it has given us. We are thankful that a diplomat of Frank Ricciardone's caliber has been assigned to our cause; he has done much to help us. We need more, however: We urge the United States to bring its full effort to bear on Iraq. The United States should put pressure on Iraq's neighbors, especially on those nations that seek to normalize relations with Saddam.

Sharif Ali: The United States is the only country in the world with a stated policy of supporting the liberation of the Iraqi people and endorsing the overthrow of Saddam's regime. This policy is enshrined in law, meaning that the U.S. commitment is rock solid rather than subject to change. We would like to see the rest of the world, particularly our Muslim and Arab neighbors, undertake this level of commitment toward overthrowing the Iraqi regime. On the other hand, we do see the potential for various adjustments to U.S. policy toward Iraq. The INC wants to provide input in shaping this policy.

Sanctions against Iraq

Sharif Ali: Although no Iraqi wants sanctions, the INC does not want Saddam to benefit from a lifting of the sanctions. The Iraqi people are being held ransom by Saddam's regime, which is causing their economic suffering. In the past, Saddam has used oil funds to oppress his people and to attack his neighbors. For example, instead of benefiting materially from the 1970s oil boom, the Iraqi people at the time stood in long lines for basic foodstuffs. Saddam terribly abuses the "oil-for-food" program. It is well documented that relief aid sits in warehouses and medicine gets reexported. The INC should be given a greater say in what supplies the Iraqis really need, more influence over how aid is distributed, and a larger role in ensuring that Saddam does not get hold of the money.

Al-Shaikhly: Sanctions have never been a successful policy when they stand alone. On their own, sanctions will not be effective at bringing down the regime because open borders with Iran and Syria enable Iraq to export goods. For sanctions to succeed, they must be accompanied by other measures.

The INC

Sharif Ali: The Iraqi opposition is diverse, as it should be, given the diversity of Iraqi society. Diversity is often falsely mistaken for disunity. In fact, we are unified in our goal of toppling Saddam's one-party dictatorship, despite Saddam's terror--which includes holding families inside Iraq as hostages. At our meeting in New York this weekend, we hope to establish even more effective coordination between opposition groups so we can garner greater world support.

Al-Shaikhly: The INC has asserted the unity of the Iraqi opposition since the Windsor meeting of May 1998. The upcoming meeting in New York will be the last step in a long march toward toppling Saddam's regime and replacing it with a democratic government. This meeting will send a message to the Iraqi people that the opposition is united and has a strategy and a vision for Iraq. We will proceed by collaborating with the forces of change inside Iraq to bring down Saddam.

◆ This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by David Honig

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