

The Future of the Iraqi Opposition

Jun 2, 1999



Brief Analysis

Dr. Adnan Pacachi, former Iraqi foreign minister and United Nations (UN) representative: The Iraqi opposition represents the yearnings and aspirations of Iraqis, who after years of oppression and dictatorship want a democratic and pluralistic government that protects the human rights of all its citizens. Saddam Husayn led Iraq into two disastrous wars; it is clear that Iraq's salvation can be achieved only through regime change. Many outside observers have suggested that more open dialogue and normalized relations would convince Saddam to renounce his methods. This is an illusion, and one that the Iraqi people do not share. They realize that only a change of regime will allow for a brighter future.

The various opposition groups have gradually come together as a single unit. The INC interim leadership council has been working with other opposition groups and an emerging centrist coalition to convene a broadly based meeting representing all segments of Iraqi society. Such a broad-based group should be able not only to support the opposition in Iraq but to achieve the support of other Arab countries and the great powers. Regime change, however, can only come from within. Many people in Iraq are currently working at great risk to themselves to destabilize Saddam's regime. The opposition will challenge Saddam's right to represent Iraq and will seek a UN resolution to that effect. The opposition will seek the creation of an international tribunal to try Saddam for crimes against humanity. These efforts should serve as a message to the people of Iraq that they are not forgotten.

Sharif Ali bin al-Hussein, leader of the Constitutional Monarchy Movement: Saddam has long tried to convince Iraqis that only he, a strongman, is capable of keeping the country intact. No Iraqi really believes this. Saddam is the most dangerous thing to Iraq. He is the one who is destroying Iraq and forcing it to fragment. The opposition wants to send the message that there will not be chaos after Saddam. On the contrary, post-Saddam Iraq will be a force for stability in both Iraq and the region.

The Iraqi opposition's goal is to overthrow the regime and replace it with a democratic, pluralistic society based on human rights and the rule of law. The opposition's diversity may be viewed as a weakness, but the opposition believes diversity is its strength. Iraqis are tired of the rule of one man and one party. Opposition groups are themselves political parties, and they cannot be expected to share the same views on everything, but they can work together to build a better future for Iraq.

Hoshyar Zibari, member of the Political Bureau of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and member of the INC Executive Presidency: Three recent developments have allowed this united Iraqi opposition to emerge after years of inactivity. First, the September 1998 signing of a Kurdish reconciliation agreement allowed the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) again to act in concert. Second, the U.S. administration has been more actively engaged, sometimes after congressional pressure. Finally, some independent Iraqi politicians have stated a willingness to work with the INC. Kurdish parties, as always, actively oppose Saddam. They want to see a pluralistic, democratic Iraq that protects all its citizens. Kurds in northern Iraq enjoy some protection from Operation Northern Watch and benefit from the presence of relief agencies, but Kurdish participation in the opposition has not gone unnoticed by Saddam. Republican Guard units near the Kurdish enclave have recently been reinforced in response to the uniting

of the opposition. The KDP and PUK require security guarantees from the United States against aggression by Saddam. They wish to avoid a situation similar to that in Kosovo, in which rapid action by a brutal dictator forces mass flight.

Mu'faq Ruba'i, independent Islamist: Regime change will come from within, probably at the hands of popular and armed forces. Iraq is in a state of latent revolution, with widespread civil unrest in the South. Iraqis know that such insurgency is always met with ruthless reprisals, but they can deal with the security forces or the police; the problem is the army. On this issue, the United States can really help by stopping the convoys and more effectively enforcing the "no drive zone" in the South.

The more Saddam is pressured internally and externally, the more he will lash out. A rumor in Iraq is that Saddam has learned from the Kosovo crisis and will use the "weapon of mass depopulation," thus destabilizing its neighbors. Another rumor is that Saddam has successfully hidden enough chemical weapons to destroy the Shi'i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. The United States and its allies must devise new means of protecting the Iraqi people that will answer these concerns.

Dr. Hatem Mukhlis, independent Sunni: Since 1991, the UN has become increasingly weak in its approach to Saddam's regime. Friends of the INC need to pressure the UN to monitor human rights violations in Iraq and to trade directly with the people of Iraq through the oil-for-food program. In the short term, the INC wants its friends and allies to pressure the world to rescue the Iraqi people. In the long term, it wants to see Iraq return to the mainstream as a healthy, wealthy, and accepted country.

Muthafar Arsalan, representative of the Turkoman National Party: The Turkomans support the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. Their goal is a parliamentary system and a pluralistic society that guarantees the rights of all of its citizens. Most Iraqi Turkomans live in areas under Saddam's control and are deprived of food, health, and basic human rights. Saddam has made a consistent effort to Arabize the cities of Mosul, Irbil, and Kirkuk. Under his rule, the Turkomans have suffered repression, intensifying a history of intolerance, deportation, and massacre that they have faced periodically in modern Iraqi history.

Ayad Allawi, secretary-general of the Iraqi National Accord (INA) and member of the INC Executive Presidency: The INC has yet to decide how it will reshape the country the day after Saddam is successfully removed. Such plans will have to wait until the convening of the General Assembly, which should convene no later than July 7. For now the United States, the opposition outside of Iraq, and the world show must their support for efforts of the Iraqi people to end Saddam's regime.

Dr. Salah al-Sheikhly, delegation spokesman: A popular misconception is that Middle Eastern states are hostile to the Iraqi opposition. In fact, the opposition is based in regional countries: the INA in Jordan, and other groups in Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Arab countries want Saddam's regime gone, but they fear that the consequences of such a change might be worse than the status quo. The INC's mission is gradually to put these misgivings to rest. The recent trip by INA leaders to Egypt made progress on this front; contrary to reports probably spread by Saddam's security forces, this trip was not an INC event and did not raise the issue of whether to hold the General Assembly in Egypt. The INC's mission is to reach by 2000 the relationship it had in 1992, when the INC was hosted by the Emir of Kuwait and the King of Saudi Arabia. Some U.S. officials have said providing the opposition with arms would violate UN sanctions on Iraq. Those sanctions were obviously targeted at Saddam's regime, so they should not be seen as applying to those trying to overthrow his regime.

Latif Rashid, London representative of the PUK and member of the INC Executive Presidency: The INC has thus far been run by a collective leadership and consensus rather than through voting or vetoes; this should remain true. The Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI) has served as a member of the INC since the very

beginning and has contributed a great deal to its activities. An independent political organization, SAIRI is not under the influence of any other state, including Iran. Its absence from this delegation stems from certain reservations it has about the mission, but it wishes to encourage the participation of all opposition groups in the INC.

Ahmad Chalabi, member of the INC Executive Presidency and INC officer responsible for U.S. relations: SAIRI also feels that Saddam will retaliate for its participation in unified opposition activities, and it wants a security guarantee -- based on UN Security Council Resolution 688 -- against intensified repression in the South. SAIRI representatives believe they can best promote this cause by staying at home rather than by participating in this delegation. They also note that, although Iran has various problems with the United States, Iranian authorities recently recognized that the U.S. administration has begun to take a different tack on Iraq and added that anyone wanting to remove Saddam Husayn should take advantage of this opportunity. The opposition is under no illusions of a U.S. guarantee to protect Iraqis against forced expulsion from the North, but Washington does need to develop such guarantees. The creation of a northern "no-drive zone" or military exclusion zone would build much more confidence among Iraqis. As a token of its willingness to protect the North, the United States should reintroduce the Military Control Commission, which entailed posting a small number of U.S. soldiers in the northern safe haven until 1996.

This report was prepared by Harlan Cohen.

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