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TOLERANCE, PEACE
AND DEMOCRACY
IN IRAQ .

WHAT ROLE FOR
THE INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY?

report commissioned by the
"Commission to Study the Organisation of Peace", USA,
in partnership with the
"International Council for Interreligious Cooperation", Belgium

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in cooperation with
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design Marco Silva

A GREEN RAY OVER IRAQ

**TOLERANCE, PEACE AND DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ
WHAT ROLE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY?**

The full version of the report can be found at
<http://tinyurl.com/groiraq> or at <http://www.box.net/shared/hgkec5xytf>

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FOREWORD

In the eve of the general elections of March 2010, and of the complete withdrawal of the multinational forces – that should take place in 2011 – it is important to think what should be the role of the international community regarding this country.

After two devastating wars, a brutal dictatorial regime; subjected first to a punitive international sanctions system, then to an international armed intervention and a civil war; Iraq came through a set of tremendous changes, some of them very negative, others giving hope for the future.

What should the international community do? Consider Iraq a country like any other with no need for a special status and attention, or, on the contrary, a country that deserves a very special awareness from the international community? And if so, what intervention should we aim at?

Our report discusses this issue in the light of the situation and prospects of Iraqi minorities – which is the most important symptom of the state of tolerance, peace and democracy in this country – of the recent historical developments in Lebanon and Gaza and the necessary new venues for the international community intervention.

It considers the three most important and recent updates of the situation in Iraq: the Iraq report version of September the 16th 2009 of the UK Border Agency; the UNHCR country guidelines of April 2009 and the 2010 UNHCR Country operations profile – Iraq. It will also include my extensive work dealing with the issue in several European Parliament reports and resolutions as well as in my books and papers on Iraq.

A section on the experience of UNIFIL in Lebanon authored by Mr. Kamal Batal and another on the situation in Gaza authored by Ms. Jamila Abu Shanab are integral part of this report. Supporting reports on Iraqi history and minorities by Mr. Nezar Jaff are also taken into consideration.

A mission report to an Iraqi refugee reception centre in München and a fact finding mission on the so-called green line separating Kurdistan from the rest of Iraq are important components of the overall report.



Ana Alves in the Museum of Terrorism, Ashraf 2008

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We are also thankful to the Iraqi refugees placed in München for their assistance in telling their full personal histories and explaining the mechanics of total cleansing implemented in Iraq. We are also thankful for Ms. Brigitta Beulen-Hayes English language corrections - remaining errors being our sole responsibility.

We are grateful to both the “Commission to Study the Organisation of Peace”, USA, and the “International Council for Interreligious Cooperation”, Belgium for the trust they placed in our team to use its experience in analysing independently the situation in Iraq and to make our recommendations public.

FROM CRADLE OF CIVILISATION TO PREY OF BARBARITY

As Iraqis never cease to remember, in Ancient times Mesopotamia was indisputably one of the cradles of civilization. Through its Sumerian, Acadian, Babylonian and Assyrian epochs, Mesopotamia drove the progress of mankind towards new challenges and beyond new frontiers. [...]

Under the Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad became the capital and Iraq lived through a relative period of stability and development that ended with the Mongol invasion. [...]

The foundation of modern Iraq did not, however, end the long-lasting main schism of the country but, on the contrary, introduced new factors of conflict.

The Iraqi monarchy was viewed as dominated by Sunni, and its fall, in 1958, did not change the situation fundamentally. In particular, after the emergence of Saddam Hussein as the strong man in the country under the Baath party the internal tensions never ceased to increase, in the context of an ever more brutal dictatorship.

The emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran aggravated substantially the situation, as the new theocratic authorities aimed at making religion its main instrument of power, either internally or externally. [...]

The war led to a radicalisation of positions, with a sizable part of the Iraqi Shiite leadership – and most notably, the Al-Hakim Clan – fleeing to Iran and becoming the Iranian front-line in the war against Iraq.

Iranian revolutionary guards would organise their Iraqi proxies –side by side with their allies among the Lebanese Shiite – under the so-called 9th Badr Corps, one of the earliest examples of a modern religious fanatic terrorist force.

These terrorist forces became quite active in the whole of the Gulf region and in particular inside Iraq. In 2003 they became the most important branch of the “hidden invasion of Iraq”¹ and as such the source of most of the problems faced by the country after the invasion.

However, it is convenient to bear in mind that during the Gulf war the bulk of the Iraqi Army was made of Shiite conscripts and that Iraq would never have succeeded if the majority of the Shiite population did not feel more loyal to their country than to a foreign power claiming to represent their own religion.

The view of the Iraqi Shiite population as a monolith under the leadership of the partisans of the Iranian Islamic Republic seems therefore to be a grave error of perspective.

In spite of a history full of massacres and conflicts, the truth is that the populations on the territory which is Iraq in our days managed to reach the XXth century – and even the XXIst century – with a remarkable degree of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity compared with most of the countries around the world.

[...]

On the Christian genocide

Here it is useful to bear in mind some distinctive features of this Genocide that we consider in the present context:

- (1) A genocide that goes unpunished, invites for its repetition;
 - (2) An internal identification element with a foreign power in a war makes it more likely for genocide to take place. The help of the Christian populations under Turkish rule to the Allied forces during the First World War was seen as an element of collective treason and sufficient reason to justify the genocide;
 - (3) The forced move of a population from its original area to a new one already settled increases the likelihood of future genocide;
 - (4) The British forces that ultimately invited Christian populations to rebel against Turks were unwilling to make any effort to defend the populations who were being persecuted exactly because they believed the promises made to them;
 - (5) The Christian enclave that was thought to be promised to the Assyrian populations in the Nineveh plains failed to materialise, and it is open to debate whether this would have constituted the best option.
-

¹ Casaca, 2008, “The Hidden Invasion of Iraq”, Acacia Publishing.

[...]

The Jewish heritage in Kirkuk citadel

During my stay in Kirkuk in the beginning of 2009, I had the opportunity to visit the old citadel of the city with a police patrol – composed of eight armed men of Arab, Kurdish and Turcoman language – serving as improvised tourist guides.

The citadel of Kirkuk had once been home for Iraqis of various ethnic and religious upbringings, namely Jews, who were most likely the biggest group.

The decay of the citadel started with the persecution of Jews in 1948. The Iraqi authorities later decided to empty it of all its inhabitants and to demolish the most visible Synagogue, breaking all existing stones.

I was absolutely impressed by the care and attention that the police force was spontaneously giving to the preservation of the remains of the Synagogue and the clear conscience of the soldiers that persecuting and destroying a cultural heritage was wrong.

They took out of the rubble the only surviving stone in a single piece and they protected it. This behaviour of the police in Kirkuk convinced me - more than anything else - that Iraq has a future and there is a generation of Iraqis ready to live together in a multicultural environment, respecting other human beings of different cultures.

[...]

One of the most ruthless and barbaric of the terrorist groups acting in Iraq is “Al-Qaeda in Iraq”, others being part of the Iraqi political establishment, like the Badr Organisation (part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards), or the Al Mahdi militia and were directly masterminded by Iran. All of them materialised a general genocide in Iraq, which is yet to be properly investigated and acted upon.

All of these groups infiltrated successfully the structures of the Iraqi state to a varying degree to the point where it became often impossible to distinguish ones from the others. A structure like the Kadhemiyah National Police detention facility – where Saddam Hussein was executed under sectarian screams from the audience – is reported to have been used to extra-judicially summarily execute by hanging hundreds of prisoners without any proper public record¹.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran is the closest precedent of the post-invasion events in Iraq. The Iraqi version, however, was much more violent and intolerant than its predecessor.

It is impossible to understand the scale of the massacres that took place after 2003 without considering the repeated persecutions and genocides witnessed within the country during the XXth century, but it is also impossible to understand them without taking into consideration its promotion and organisation by foreign powers, in particular, the Islamic Republic.

The contemporary genocide in Iraq led to a yet undetermined number of casualties and injured people as well as to the internal or external exile of a number of people estimated to be between four and five million.



Erbil - photo Madalena Casaca, December 2009

¹ Report by the Independent quoted by both UNHCR April 2009 and by the UK border agency. Point 15.08, page 102.

UNHCR is here the most authoritative source, and we only have to go through the repeated reports of the organisation to understand the brutal scale of the humanitarian disaster – unparalleled in our time – and the lack of proper attention given either by the Iraqi authorities or by the international community. According to the most recent UNHCR report on Iraq “There are an estimated 4.2 million uprooted people in Iraq – more than in any other country in the World”¹. [...]

This massive exodus of Iraqis is directly linked with the widespread persecution for a large number of motives, the most common being the belonging to an ethnic or religious minority:

“The UNHCR guidelines of April 2009 stated that: (...)

“Since 2003, members of religious and ethnic minorities have become regular victims of discrimination, harassment and serious human rights violations, with incidents ranging from intimidation and threats to the destruction of property, kidnapping, rape, forced conversion and murder. As a result of sustained attacks on minority groups their numbers have dwindled significantly since the fall of the former regime in 2003. According to UNAMI HRO members of minority groups continue to be attacked with “total impunity” and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom said that Iraq’s leaders were tolerating attacks on religious minorities. Criminal groups have also singled out members of certain religious minorities given their particularly vulnerable status and/or their perceived wealth...”

It is also important to consider that the persecution opened new fronts. Whereas Iraq had been a relatively tolerant Arab country

regarding gender issues and it was not particularly intolerant towards sexual orientations, the new Iraq curtailed existing rights of women and allowed the persecution and murder of those thought to have behaved out of their perceived strict moral code.

Regarding Women, and according to the UK Border Agency Report: “In a statement on 25 November 2008, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women declared that “Iraqi women have eroded in all areas of life”².

“The USSD report further noted that Basra police reported that 40 women were murdered in 2007 for not covering their heads and conforming to a conservative Muslim style of dress”³.

Regarding sexual orientation issues, still according to the same report:

“The death squads of the Badr organisation and the Mahdi army are targeting gays and lesbians, according to UN reports, in a systematic campaign of sexual cleansing. They proudly boast of their success, claiming they have already exterminated all “perverts and sodomites” in many of the major cities”⁴.

Otherwise, the systematic targeting of the Iraqi intelligentsia and professional classes can only be understood as a form of decapitating the country of its elites and therefore to destroy its capacity to affirm itself as an independent country.

Another persecuted group was the one of foreign refugees, namely Palestinian and Iranian ones, both of them targeted by well-organised armed gangs. As most of these refugees came into Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s rule, they were also labelled “Baathist”, which is the most common accusation justifying harassment and persecution.



Kurdistan - photo Ana Alves, 2008

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486426>.

² United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Point 25.03, page 153.

³ United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Point 25.14, page 156.

⁴ United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Point 23.06, page 148, quoting the Guardian, on 25 September 2008.

Palestinians have been systematically wiped-out of Iraq, namely from Baghdad, where most of them used to live.

The Iranian refugees in the South, Arabs from the Marshes and other Ahwazi of Arab ethnic origin, were also driven out by a merciless campaign of assassinations.

In the North, the Iranian refugees are mostly Kurdish and, as such, they have not been persecuted, although they have been pressed to stop any opposition to Iran. Some of them, namely those organised in an armed resistance group, like PEJAK, found shelter in the border mountains in a co-existence relation with PKK Kurdish rebels from Turkey.

The Iranian armed forces have been destroying systematically all existing Iraqi Kurdish villages within forty kilometres of its border with the Erbil province in Kurdistan, and thousands of Kurdish Iraqi had to flee this area.

The only significant remaining group of exiled refugees in Iraq has been the one constituted by PMOI militants that was protected by the US forces up to 2008 in camp Ashraf, as the US recognised them as protected under Geneva conventions.

Camp Ashraf and the members of the group have been targeted

by terrorist attacks in such a way that they were able to organise a museum of terrorism documenting in the most impressive way the terrorist attacks they were victims of, before and after 2003, most likely committed by the same groups using the same techniques.

Terrorist attacks targeted everyone that dared to visit Ashraf camp or to establish any sort of relation with the Iranian opposition members, and this was the case in the surrounding province of Diyala as well as in Baghdad and other areas of Iraq.



With the Bishop of Erbil, Abdulla Aljubori and Madalena Casaca, Erbil 2009



Oil refinery in Sulleymania - photo Madalena Casaca, December 2009

Iraqi authorities and the Iranian refugees from camp Ashraf

In 2009, the US handed the security of camp Ashraf over to the Iraqi authorities. This was the most important test for the tolerance and humanity of the new Iraqi authorities, and the least that can be said is that this test gave strong reasons for concern to the international community.

In the end of July the World was shocked to see alive broadcasted by the Web, a brutal massacre of unarmed people in Ashraf by an Iraqi military squad under the direct supervision of the Iraqi Prime Minister's Office.

Armoured vehicles trying to overrun people running and brutal beatings, where around a dozen people were murdered and hundreds were injured, were broadcasted all over the world.

Actually, some of the responsible people in Iraq have been very clear in stating that they want to turn life unbearable in Ashraf, and the Iraqi authorities even nominated a committee that aims at extinguishing Ashraf, with a terminology that resembles the one used by the Nazis regarding Jews and gypsies.

As I have been in close contact with so many displaced and refugee Iraqis, I have recognised here the very same violence and barbarity used by political thugs and terrorist gangs elsewhere to terrorise entire sectors of the Iraqi population into exile.

I wonder how is it possible that someone who runs under the banner of the creation of Iraq as a "State of Law" can promote such actions.

It is only fair to say, however, that events showed that there are

some important elements of a "State of Law" in Iraq, and the recent events in Ashraf are also important to understand this.

In the wake of the attack against Ashraf residents, the Iraqi police forces imprisoned 36 residents. However, the Iraqi judicial system, first through the local judge in Al-Khalis and afterwards through the national prosecutor in the Ministry of Justice in Baghdad opposed this political abuse and ordered the authorities to release them. Although the police authorities resisted judicial orders for some time, they ultimately decided to obey, and to release the prisoners.

This is a remarkable sign of the independence of the Iraqi judicial authorities and gives hopes to all of those who really aim at a "State of Law" for Iraq.

Of course, I do not think it was a coincidence that only some weeks after this courageous decision of the Iraqi judicial authorities, the Ministry of Justice in Baghdad suffered an enormous bomb attack, which once again showed how threatened all those are who seek justice and fairness in this country.

After this incident, the Iraqi authorities announced their plans to re-open in the Southern desert close to the border with Saudi Arabia one of the most sinister prisons of the former regime, used for political prisoners, to jail these PMOI residents. However, due to the increased international pressure, they did not implement the plan, which was shelved for the time being.

The persecution of Iranian refugees in Ashraf is part of the same drama that has been developing in Iraq in the recent past, and the outcome of this crisis will symbolise more than anything else what we can expect for the future of Iraq.



Kurdistan - photo Ana Alves, 2008



A THORNY ROAD OUT OF CHAOS

[...]

Although the situation in Iraq has improved steadily after 2007, it is far from being stabilised, and it is doubtful if it consolidates as a state of law, as promised by its present authorities. An Iraq developing into an even more intolerant version of the Iranian theocracy is a clear possibility.

Some quotations of the UK Border Agency report which we are using to base this report can explain why:

“The UNHCR Guidelines of April 2009 also recorded that where Baghdad has once been an ethnically mixed city it was now a mix of “rival ethnic and religious enclaves whose residents rarely intersected outside their gated communities”¹.

This is happening everywhere in Iraq with the exception of the areas under Kurdish control.

“The USDoD [US Department of Defence] report, March 2009, stated that:

“It is currently assessed that most violent activity within the Baghdad Security Districts is conducted by either AQI or Shi’a militia elements. AAH [Asai’b Al-Haq] and KH [Ketaib Hezbollah], among other insurgent and militant groups, continue to maintain cells in Baghdad but have had a difficult time conducting operations. The difficult operating environment has caused many operatives to stay in Iran or discontinue activities in Baghdad. However, neither of these groups has given up on Baghdad, and both continue attempts to re-establish networks despite recent arrests. These and other insurgent and militant groups continue low-level operations, and caches continue to be discovered”².

The precarious balance between national Iraqi structures supported by the US and the Iranian sponsored structures infiltrated in Iraq under the religious cover-up of Shiite religion (erroneously perceived by the invading planners as a different ethnic group) is present everywhere, even in the Iraqi secret services:

The CSIS report, published on 20 April 2009, stated that “Iraq’s national-level intelligence apparatus remains divided between a CIA-supported “official” agency (the Iraqi National Intelligence Service or INIS) and a Shi’ite-run agency (under the auspices of the Minister of State for National Security (MSNSA), Shirwan al-Waely)...”³.

As General Petraeus recently highlighted in an interview to the Time magazine of January the 25th the so-called “Accountability and Justice Commission” responsible for removing circa 500 candidates from the Iraqi elections is instrumentalised by the Quods force of the IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps).

He also clarified in this interview that a majority of the 500 blacklisted candidates were of a Shiite confession; therefore it makes no sense to see this action as a result of inter-confessional rivalries, but rather, as it often happens in Iraq, as a blunt interference of the Islamic Republic in Iraq using the religious cover-up.

In these circumstances it is legitimate to conclude that what appears to be a stabilisation of the situation might only be a temporary truce. Mass ethnic cleansing has already produced the expected results and the relative peace depends on the maintenance of multiple heavily guarded walls or barriers dividing ethnic and religious groups; most of the armed gangs might be sleepers waiting for more favourable conditions to resume operations.

¹ UK Border Agency report. Point 8.26, page 43.

² USDoD [US Department of Defence] report, March 2009. Point 8.25, page 42.

³ CSIS report, published on 20 April 2009. Point 10.52, page 72.



Displaced Iraqis in Kirkuk - photo Ana Alves, January 2009



Sindjar - photo Madalena Casaca, December 2009

FROM THE GREEN LINE TO THE GREEN RAY

According to article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, the allocation to a specific province or region of the so-called disputed territories, that include the province of Kirkuk as well as other districts situated around the green-line (the old divide between the territory controlled by Saddam Hussein and the ones controlled by the Kurdish forces) should be decided on the basis of the will of its inhabitants and ultimately, if needed, by mediation of the United Nations.

This has been viewed as an explosive and destabilising issue lying ahead of Iraq's future.

Kurdish authorities are very strict on the question of the democratic consultation of the population. The President of the Kurdish Parliament, Mr. Kamal Al-Kirkuki, told me in a very formal way on the 12th December, that the disrespect of the popular will as forecasted by the Iraqi Constitution could provoke an open armed conflict. [...]

On my present fact finding mission to the region, and as I had been in Kirkuk a short time before, I decided to concentrate my attention on Sinjar – an important Yazidi area – and Bakhdida (in Arabic Al Hamdaniya, in Turkish Qara Qosh, now used as the name of the main town, the district using the other two names indistinctly) which is an important Christian area.

We consulted some community leaders and Kurdish authorities, consultation with other Iraqi authorities unfortunately pending on an unanswered Visa request. I asked for and got support from the Kurdish authorities to conduct the mission by them providing military police escorts.

Sinjar lies at the North-western edge of Iraq, bordered by Tal-Afar to the East, Al Ba'aj to the South and Syria to the Northwest. The district became sadly famous for being the target of the world's deadliest terrorist attack after September eleventh attack on the US.

Although Sinjar has a solid Yazidi majority we can find significant presences of all the major ethnic and other religious groups of Iraq (Arabs, Kurds, Turcoman, Assyrian-Chaldeans, Shiite and Sunni Muslims and Christians).

In Sinjar I met circa thirty opinion leaders in a gathering organised by the Mayor and the President of the District Council where religious and lay leaders, women and men from all existing ethnic and religious groups were present.

The opinions on both the most contentious issues, the existence of village self-defence forces supported financially and organisationally by the Kurdish regional authorities and the popular consultation on the attachment of Sinjar to Kurdistan or to Nineveh province was solidly and unanimously positive.

Furthermore, some of our interlocutors expressed support for the consultation to take place before the US withdrawal. The UN capacity to undertake the consultation process and to guarantee security was widely viewed with scepticism.

Local people from Khataniya – the town targeted by the terrorist blast that killed five hundred people – explained to me that although in practical terms the village reported to Sinjar, it is formally part of Al Ba'aj district, which shows how intricate the political mapping of the region is. Furthermore, I realised that Tal-Afar would become a sort of Nineveh Island in Kurdish territory in the likely scenario where the majority Arab district of Tal-Afar would vote for belonging to Nineveh while Sinjar would vote for belonging to the Kurdistan region.

On the question of the referendum, I later conducted a random inquiry on locations and interviewees I chose in the main street of the town, in the bazaar, and in the local hospital, where circa twenty people were addressed.

With the exception of two persons – both Sunni Arabs coming from a village in Ba'aj, the neighbouring Arab majority district – the respondents were absolutely clear on their demand for a rapid popular referendum.





Kirkuk - photo Ana Alves, January 2009

Regarding the district of Bakhdida / Al Hamdaniya, we conducted several meetings with representatives of the two most important towns: Qara Qosh and Bartella, which are overwhelmingly Christian, although surrounded by villages that are mostly Shabak or otherwise Muslim Sunni or Shiite. We also had an extended meeting with the Catholic Bishop of Erbil.

The need for self-defence forces protecting these two towns was self-evident for all our interviewees, and no one questioned them. There was a unanimous appreciation of the Kurdish Regional Government support to these forces. [...]

My main conclusions on this matter are:

(1) It is essential to promote a massive job-creation strategy aiming at the well-being and the security of the Iraqi people;

(2) It is necessary to keep the existing self-defence forces in Christian, Turcoman or Yazidi villages in order to protect the lives of these ethnic or religious minorities. As UNHCR April 2009 report on Iraqi refugees states, it is quite likely that the subsistence of terrorist groups and major violence in the province of Nineveh, contrarily to the diminution of the violence registered in the provinces of Anbar, Salahidin and Diyala, has to do with the non-existence of self-defence forces in Arab villages;

(3) The democratic and constitutional right of the Iraqi people in the disputed territories to decide on the territorial organisation of their towns cannot be put into question. The policy of appeasement towards authoritarian neighbouring regimes or terrorist strategies will not only betray the democratic aspirations of the Iraqi people but risk to destabilise the whole region;

(4) The United Nations are ultimately responsible for the implementation of article 140. In the context of its mandate and considering the US withdrawal, it is fundamental for the UN to dispose of blue helmets to insure security on the green line as well as of displaced people and refugees in certain other areas of the country;



Diyala Province - photo Ana Alves, 2008

MÜNCHEN, MAX-PRÖBSTLSTRASSE, 12

[...]

I had never before seen Ms. Hayfa Ahmed, but like many other Iraqi refugees, she got into contact with me through someone I met in Iraq and, as I did with everyone else I came across, I helped her as I could. As she is now in a refugee camp in München, it was easier to get in touch with her and this is one of the reasons why we decided to interview her. I spent four hours there, on December the 8th 2009. [...]

Several Iraqis wanted to tell us their stories of suffering, persecution, torture, kidnapping and assassination of relatives, stories that we heard many times before from many other people in several parts of Iraq (Casaca, 2008).

They fully justify the creation of an international judiciary authority to investigate and persecute genocide and other crimes against humanity in the post-2003 Iraq.

Most of the residents in the refugee camp were Christians, but we could find members of other minorities as well as Sunni Muslim Arabs.

Ms. Hayfa Ahmed was born in 1957 and is a mother of four children. She is separated from her husband who has been living in Qatar since 2000 and who remained responsible for the three elder children, Ms. Ahmed living with her younger daughter.

She was a civil servant in the Iraqi government, where she was working in a financial control department up to 1985 when she left office to take care of her children. When she wanted to resume her work as a civil servant in 1991 she was not accepted, according to her because of her non-affiliation with the Baath party.

Since then being a jobless divorced mother has made her life quite difficult. She viewed the opportunities created by the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in a very positive way, and she became involved in a women's rights association and in politics. She was a candidate (not elected) for the December 2005 elections.

In the context of her women's association activities she visited the Iranian refugee camp of PMOI in Ashraf, as this organisation gives a strong priority to a gender equal rights agenda. She and her association worked with the Iraqi National Tribes Association for a conference in Hotel Babylon in Baghdad on the women in the Iraqi Constitution, a conference she would have been chairing. However, the Ministry of the Interior forbade and stopped it using military force.

Ms. Ahmed thinks that the government and the militia were working together to persecute those who were politically active on topics that contend frontally with the religious fanatic agenda of the pro-Iranian factions, such as gender issues, and in particular, those who somehow supported the Iranian opposition.

Ms. Ahmed thinks that Iranian agents – through militia or infiltrated in the Iraqi official structures – tried to assassinate systematically all those who came in contact with the Iranian opposition in Ashraf. This is an opinion corroborated by many other Iraqis I met.

After her visits to Ashraf and in particular after the forbidden conference, she received several anonymous threats to her life, which became very terrifying after the episode of the bombing of the Samarra Shiite shrine in early 2006.

As she is a first degree cousin of Mr. Tarik Al Hashemi, Vice-President of Iraq, she followed the successive assassination of most of his brothers and other relatives with particular concern. If a Vice-President of the country was helpless to stop the assassination of his brothers and sisters, how could a lonely woman guarantee the survival of her teenage daughter?

Ms. Ahmed, together with her daughter, first abandoned her house and became an internal fugitive in Baghdad, hiding in houses of friends or relatives. She decided to run away from Iraq when the sister of Vice-President Tariq Al-Hashemi, Maysun Al-Hashemi, herself a member of the Iraqi Parliament, was murdered.

She first escaped to Syria, but when she was told that US authorities would never give asylum to refugees in Damascus, she managed to enter Jordan, where she applied for refugee statute to the UNHCR.

As she remained stranded in Jordan, she tried her chances in Qatar, where one of her cousins, the only surviving brother of Vice-President Tarik Al-Hashemi, lived as a refugee. Qatar authorities however did not accept her, and gave her a month to leave the country or she would be expelled to Iraq. The prospect of being forcefully sent to Iraq terrorised Ms. Ahmed. UNHCR would not help her either, since she left Jordan without informing them or without their authorisation. Ms. Ahmed asked my help.

A Qatar human-rights organisation got in contact with Ms. Ahmed. It bought them return tickets to Jordan, assisted them financially and managed to convince the Jordanian authorities to accept them back and the UNHCR to resume efforts for finding an asylum for Ms. Ahmed and her daughter.

UNHCR developed continued efforts to find asylum for Ms. Ahmed, as it does for every asylum seeker. However, it took a couple of years for IMO (International Migration Organisation) to find a country willing to accept Ms. Ahmed and her daughter. [...]



Kurdistan - photo Ana Alves, 2008

UNIFIL IN LEBANON

by *Kamal Batal*

UNIFIL compiled, edited and amended by Kamal Batal

Points of Concern

My main conclusions as a keen observer of the UNIFIL presence in Lebanon are the following:

(1) When the UNIFIL mandate was extended under UNSCR 1701 the world did not take into consideration the level of control Hezbollah has over the Lebanese government. This control is either direct by having party members placed in key positions, or indirect by exercising sufficient influence because of threat of arms in the possession of Hezbollah.

(2) There is no transparency mechanism in the UNIFIL operation. This mechanism is very important to implement in order to minimize corruption and control by Hezbollah on UNIFIL. Important procurement contracts being awarded to shady companies with no implementation control mechanism is a key point of concern. Transparency is in special need on the UNIFIL recruitment office, in particular to ensure that Hezbollah is not in a position to influence all recruitment decisions.

(3) The UNIFIL is not providing the Lebanese government with training. This is very important as the Lebanese government cannot develop good governance on its own. UNIFIL should have a clear good governance training duty in its mandate especially that it is entrusted to “assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority”.

(4) The UNIFIL should also monitor the spread of harmful propaganda not just the spread and use of weapons. Today the war of ideas is much more important than the war of weapons.

(5) Hezbollah has stated repeatedly that it holds UNIFIL as a hostage for its international negotiations. This is a very dangerous situation as the UNIFIL constantly finds itself in a situation to negotiate its security with Hezbollah



Gas station on the road between Baghdad & Kirkuk - photo Ana Alves, 2008



In the main Bazaar in Sindjar - photo Madalena Casaca, December 2009

ELECTIONS IN GAZA

by Jamila Abu Shanab

On the aftermath of the 2006 parliamentary elections: collapse of the Palestinian democracy

The Parliamentary elections in Palestine were unquestionably free and democratic, as was testified by everyone, namely by the international observers that oversaw them. However, democracy was over the moment the votes were counted. The military suppression organised by Hamas in Gaza showed how the language of dialogue was replaced by the language of the weapons, and a situation of strong polarisation between Hamas and Fatah ensued.

Human-rights organisations reported the killing of political prisoners under torture in both the prisons of Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. The partisans of both factions became targets of mutual revenge.

Even international organisations like the Red-Cross are not authorised to visit prisons or to have access to information regarding political prisoners. Several activists were harassed and are not allowed to make impartial inquiries or to contact information sources.

And although the division and the struggle for power between the two major organisations are the two main reasons for the marginalisation of the democratic forces or of left leaning organisations, the international community did not help the moderate factions that could become a third force capable of creating an equilibrium position. Even the members of the European Parliament visiting Gaza do not meet third organisations, what would help them to have a different and more realistic appraisal of reality.

The international community that has applauded vehemently the Oslo Agreements and that has heavily financed the Palestinian Authority failed to make a proper follow-up of its commitments and financial control of its funds and this can be identified as a major reason of the Palestinian democracy failure.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A future for Iraqi uprooted people

There is no mystery on the reason why Iraq is the country with the most uprooted people in the World (UNHCR data): Iraqi population cleansing is already the biggest in the history of mankind in the XXIst century!

Iraq will be remembered by another sad characteristic: it is the first example of a “total cleansing”. Whereas in history we have witnessed the targeting of groups of people according to their ethnic/religious perceived differentiation, in Iraq we can say that virtually every ethnic/religious group became a target, as long as it would find itself as a different part in a specific environment.

Persecution, however, did not only target religious or ethnic groups, it targeted those who could distinguish themselves through position, profession or knowledge, those being foreign political refugees, those whose actions, outfit or political thinking would not be conform with the moral code of modern religious fanaticism. All those were targets.

Neither child, nor woman, neither sick nor defenceless; no one was spared!

In the name of “de-Baathification” horrendous crimes that match those committed by the deposed and executed dictator were committed, and they simply cannot remain unspoken of.

For once, these crimes did not come out of the blue, they were not simply the product of any local, tribal, national or religious paranoia; they were made possible by a misguided invasion driven by the West.

And for all those who honestly thought that Iraq was being liberated – and I am a witness that indeed, to a large extent it was shortly and partially liberated – it is simply impossible to remain indifferent in front of the disaster, to turn the back to people who should deserve our highest admiration.

To bring up-rooted people of Iraq back to where they belong is not simply a matter of housing or financial incentives; it is a matter of bringing justice and accountability to a country where crime remained unpunished for too long a time.

To respect Iraqi up-rooted people is a duty for us all, and it is a gesture of decency from all those who – in good-faith – thought the dismissal of Saddam Hussein was opening a new era of opportunities and understanding.

As this report highlights repeatedly, the situation of Iraqi up-rooted people will be the distinct factor that will allow us to evaluate the future of Iraq, since there will be no peace, no democracy or reconciliation without justice.

Bringing to justice – either before an Iraqi judicial system or before an international court – all those who committed crimes against humanity and provoked the biggest human cleansing of the century is a fundamental requirement for peace and democracy in this country and elsewhere.

Building a State of Law

This report highlights the remarkable improvement of the situation in Iraq through the past two years as well as the outstanding role of General David Petraeus in these positive developments.

However, it also highlights that these developments will remain fragile as long as real reconciliation based on justice does not take place: “The UNHCR Guidelines of April 2009 also recorded that where Baghdad has once been an ethnically mixed city it was now a mix of “rival ethnic and religious enclaves whose residents rarely intersected outside their gated communities”. (Point 8.26, p.43 UK Border Agency Report).

Apart from the very obvious invasion, there was a hidden invasion of Iraq disastrous for the future of this country. If there is a clear deadline for the withdrawal of the Allied Forces, this is unfortunately not the case for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and their close agents that have heavily infiltrated Iraqi State structures.

Apart from the terrorist and militia gangs directed and controlled to different extents by Teheran or on its behalf by their allies, and apart from those organisations in the Iraqi present establishment that were created, organised, financed and controlled by Iran – such as the Badr organisation – the hard core of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, the Quods Force, remains in control of such important bodies as the so-called “Accountability and Justice Commission” as it was recently highlighted by General Petraeus (Time magazine, 25th of January 2010).

This Commission, which succeeded the so-called “de-Baathification committee”, forbid 500 candidates to run in the Iraqi elections using the old rhetoric of “de-baathification”. In so doing, it was clearly trying to apply the Iranian procedure where only aligned candidates are admitted.

The establishment of a “state of law in Iraq” will need an “Iraqisation” of the state, ensuring that no foreign agents are in control, and it will need to secure equality of all in front of the law, that is, a non-sectarian policy which is clearly still far from being implemented.

The most definite test for the Iraqi authorities will be the way they treat camp Ashraf residents – the only significant remaining group of foreign refugees that has not been subject of “total-cleansing”



Meeting with community leaders, Sindjar, December 2009

A strategy for employment and growth

As much as the progressive ruin of the economic and social fabric of Iraq were the most depressive features in my past travels in Iraq, last December I was mostly impressed by the absolute priority politicians as well as business people gave to the rebuilding, growth and employment. The most important factor for an “economic surge” to take place is there: it is the strong will of economic, political and social actors.

News regarding oil development and the engagement of companies from nearly every corner of the World were also very positive and helped creating an encouraging atmosphere that was, however, significantly undermined by the military take-over of an oil-well in the border region by the Iranian forces.

This Iranian military intervention acted as a warning of the unresolved things lying ahead of Iraq and substantially cooled down optimism, as did the highly sophisticated bomb attacks in Baghdad, which could only be organised through a strong coordination from outside and infiltration in the Iraqi defence structures.

For all these reasons the main priority remains to invest in agriculture, construction and in the provision of public and private services badly needed by the population. All these activities bear a high employment generation potential.

To create stable and peaceful employment is the number one priority for Iraq not least because this is the only consistent way to create alternatives to the generation of violence.

To this aim commitment of the international community is essential, especially when we are about to witness a massive withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq.

Lessons from Lebanon and Gaza

The main lesson we can draw from the international community's attitudes both in Gaza and in Lebanon is that it is crucial to ensure democracy.

Democracy is more than a ballot and the possibility of casting your vote according to your wishes, although this is obviously the backbone of any democratic system. If there is not a state of law, if there is not the respect for others, we will not have democracy but demagoguery and soon after that tyranny, as Aristotle so brilliantly explained thousands of years ago.

The unilateral withdrawal of Israel from Gaza, the organisation of elections with the participation of fully armed political movements rightly classified as terrorist by the international community, and the absence of any UN presence that could prevent the very likely scenario of the promise of democracy being transformed into tyranny were obvious errors whose consequences are being paid for by the Palestinian citizens of Gaza.

In Lebanon, the creation of UNIFIL was certainly positive and helped to prevent a catastrophic resurgence of civil war in this country. However, the international community did not have the decisiveness to properly implement its resolutions and to disarm Hezbollah as foreseen in UNSC resolution 1559 of 2004.

This already caused the outbreak of war in 2006, and it is very likely to happen again. Hezbollah has stronger and more organised armed forces than Lebanon as a country. It actually keeps the whole of the political establishment in its country and the international community under blackmail.

The parallels between Iraq and Lebanon could not be more striking. In both countries there are large Shiite communities and in both countries the Iranian leadership founded political movements with strong terrorist military wings based on the manipulation of religious sentiments, Lebanese Hezbollah and the Superior Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

We know from public testimonies of Ahwazi [Ahwaz, Khuzestan or Arabistan is the name of the South-western Iranian province with an original Arab population] refugees, that the terrorist training camps of both the Lebanese and Iraqi organisations were next to each other and they received military training and ideological indoctrination from the same Iranian revolutionary guards.

So, if we are to succeed in Iraq and avoid the drama of Gaza or the situation in Lebanon, and especially take into consideration the withdrawal of US troops, the international community has to ensure a stronger presence in Iraq and must insist on the fulfilment of conditions for the implementation of a "State of Law".

A Green Ray over Iraq

In the last couple of years, most of the international public opinion has been conveying the message that the future of the so-called disputed territories, that is, those territories confronting the old green-line separating the areas under Kurdish and Iraqi control, is the most important issue in Iraq.

We do not share this point of view, namely because we think that the four previous points will be more crucial than the so-called future of the disputed territories. In a democratic Iraq – which means, a successful Iraq in responding to these four challenges – the decision of the disputed territories on what province and or region they want to be will have to be taken on the basis of the Iraqi Constitution and democratic opinion of the concerned citizens.

This has so far been the position of the Kurdish regional authorities and, after our mission, after consulting freely with people from a various of ethnic or religious origins in several places in the disputed territories as well as after considering several international organisation's reports, we do not see any valid reason to question it.

If there are countries in the region that feel threatened by the possibility of seeing examples of regional autonomy and democratic rule in Iraqi Kurdistan, perhaps the international community should better invite these countries to reconsider their attitudes rather than Iraq to reconsider its constitution and the principle of democratic sovereignty.

Kurdistan regional authorities' human rights credentials are certainly not perfect, but we simply have to consider the fact that there is no movement of people wanting to escape from Kurdistan whereas millions of Iraqis fled the rest of Iraq, into Kurdistan whenever they could, to understand how devious it is not to acknowledge the differences between Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq.

On my trip within the disputed territories – Kirkuk, Sinjar and Al Hamdaniya – I found a complete consensus on the need for self-defence forces, and my inquiry in Sinjar also proved there was an overall consensus for a referendum. It is hard to understand

how an organisation that did not even visit these places argues for the contrary only on the basis of “realpolitik” arguments.

In view of the findings of our report, it seems clear that the withdrawal of the US forces from Kirkuk and the vicinity of the Green line turn a reinforced UN presence into a matter of urgency.

Notwithstanding it is the view of our research-team that tremendously difficult mapping questions remain to be answered for a new “green-line” to be established, and that a consensus and a common agreed set of principles are the best tools to build a better Iraq and a better Iraqi Kurdistan.

We therefore appeal to the Kurdish regional leadership as well as to the whole of the Iraqi democratic political leadership to look differently at the disputed territories. Instead of seeing the future in new divisive strict lines on Iraqi soil, it might be useful to remember the famous Julius Verne romance on the green ray, the last ray of the Sunset, and to bear in mind that the Sun is the symbol of Kurdistan, and the Sun sets to the West, that is, in the direction of the green line, where the disputed territories are situated.

Only a green ray of hope, of understanding, mutual respect, solidarity, which means joining the rich diversity and cultural heritage of the Iraqi peoples, can ultimately sort out the difficult challenges facing Iraq.



Kurdistan - photo Ana Alves, 2008

ANNEX ACCOUNTS

The authors of this report worked on a strictly voluntary basis. The accounts here presented are still provisional.

I. Expenses

(1) Travel and Accommodation	9.169,19 Euros
(2) Computer and Communications	2.917,18 Euros
(3) Stationary and Mail	170, 11 Euros
(4) Services Assistant and Communications support	2.000,00 Euros
(5) Report Edition (estimate, not yet spent)	3.000,00 Euros

I. Total	17.256,48 Euros
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II. Receipts

(1) Grant by CSOP, attributed	7.500,00 Euros
(2) Grant by CSOP, expected	2.500,00 Euros

II. Total	10.000,00 Euros
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Expected cost to the main author	7.256,48 Euros
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Paulo Casaca Portuguese economist, he lectured at the University of the Azores and at the Technical University in Lisbon. He worked in the Portuguese diplomatic representation to the European Union; he was chief of cabinet in the Portuguese government and economics adviser at the socialist fraction in the national Parliament. He was a member of the Azorean Regional Parliament and he represented the Azores at the Portuguese and European Parliaments. He founded the first Amnesty International group in the Azores and has been engaged in the protection of human-rights in the Greater Middle-East, in particular in Iraq.

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