

WHAT IS SOVEREIGNTY WHEN THE US CONTROLS IRAQ

By virtue of American democracy, a CIA-trained former Ba'athist with British connections has become the Prime Minister of a Shiite-majority country. After America's Italian and Polish allies enjoyed the ultimate joke by US President George Bush –who went ahead with the so-called 'handover of sovereignty' without keeping them in the know-, the question that arises now is to whether the new government of Iyad Allawi will be able to re-establish security in a country ravaged by war and unrest.

Before that, let us put an end to a grotesque political farce that has been going on for too long now: "sovereignty". What sovereignty are we talking about? How sovereign can a country which is occupied by foreign military forces; which has no control over its air and sea ports and which has no say in its internal security matters be? *"If I was the Iraqi general in charge, I'd be upset because there's a security company doing things I think I should be doing"* said the Custerbattles security firm's representative in Iraq further to the announcement of contracts worth millions of dollars to British security companies. *"US forces will stay in Iraq as long as it will be necessary and they will remain under the command of the Coalition"* said Bush. But sovereignty is universal: it is not a transfer of some powers.

The United Nations unanimously came up with Resolution 1546 on June 8th. The resolution said that an interim government would fully assume power and take charge of the country, but will avoid any decisions that could interfere with the future of Iraq after the interim period. It also said that on June 30th the occupation will cease and Iraq will get back its full sovereignty. The alternatives originally conceived by the Bush administration were either a Pentagon-supported Ahmed Chalabi with a radical regime change, or a CIA-supported Allawi with a mild de-ba'athification process. This is where we stand now but still, America goes on pulling the strings. Each Iraqi 'Minister', most of them having foreign travel and other documents, are seconded by American consultants. The US 'Embassy' has a staff of 1700 including 900 American citizens. Former President Saddam Hussain is 'handed over' to the new authorities but still is 'protected' by US forces. And his trial, which will of course be 'fair' as it is in the hands of Chalabi's nephew, will take place on a US military base - provided of course he finds judges who don't get shot down once appointed. (Five have already been killed). At least he will not have to look for local journalists: they are forbidden from attending. One should never forget that there is no example in history in which a country where foreign forces are present has enforced long lasting political changes with success. An occupied country doesn't change its constitution. And if the Iraqis want to put their former President on trial, they should do it by themselves.

Hence, it is no surprise that, given the present uncertain situation in Iraq, there is no consensus on the chances of success of the Allawi government. But as far as the Bush administration is concerned, the odds are clear: it will lose in all cases. The dilemma indeed stems from the autonomy that the Americans are prepared to give to Allawi. If they behave as they have been doing so far, violence will reach unprecedented levels and a Vietnamisation process will take root.

If, on the contrary, Allawi is given the necessary means to re-establish the rule of law, which goes beyond the presence of his US soldier-bodyguards, a return in law and order would obviously strengthen his position. To do so, however, it is necessary that this former Ba'athist reverts to some methods or has recourse to some people that the Bush administration and its Israeli friends do not want to be seen anymore. This brings us back to the reasons for the war -

reshaping the Middle East, bringing democracy and suppressing any threat to Israel. This cannot go together with the return of a strong Ba'ath-minded Iraq. "*There will be no return for the Ba'ath and Saddam*" Chalabi said in an interview. "*My affiliation with the Ba'ath party has given me a great political experience*", noted Allawi. This is enough for the many Ba'athist cells spread over the country to resume activity, as they did with the creation of the United Council for Iraqi Resistance.

For now, the US will go on lying. The new American ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte, whose track record on the death squads in Honduras will re-emerge some day, will go on saying that the US has played no role in picking names or that in Iraq, American forces will be free to operate as they see fit. As a preliminary to Michael Moore's movie 'Fahrenheit 9/11', a documentary by William Karel, 'The world according to Bush', confirms that we have now entered an era of meddling, end of national sovereignty and 'the emergence of publicised emotions as a new guide for international relationship'. In Iraq and elsewhere, America's partners have the choice of either aligning themselves unreservedly with Washington or being considered antagonists – "*to be poodle or end-up in the doghouse*", as an analyst summed-up recently. At a time when some European pro-Western politicians are calling for the re-building of a Transatlantic alliance, one may rightfully wonder how can this happen when one has to talk with people who do not admit controversy anymore.

Luc Debievre, July 5th, 2004