

Lebanon War Resonates in Iraq

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PMC - Nicola Nasser - The Israeli war on Lebanon has shaken the sectarian pillar of the U.S.-Israeli regional plans, especially in the Iraqi launching pad of the U.S.-promoted 'New Middle East,' where major ethnic and sectarian minorities are being incited against their historical peaceful co-existence with the cultural Pan-Arab and Islamic heritage of the Arab majority as well as against each other.

Palestine Media Centre

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The reverberations in Iraq of the U.S.-backed Israeli war on Lebanon have been so widespread and deep to shatter a three-year old political orientation of the Iraqis towards doing away with their Pan-Arab identity and isolating their country from its geopolitical Arab and Islamic incubator, in a massive sectarian brainwashing that has pushed Iraqis to the brink of an all out civil war.

Sectarian as well as Pan-Arab solidarity took hundreds of thousands of Iraqis into the streets with yellow Hezbollah banners above their heads and U.S. and Israeli flags beneath their feet. (1)

The solidarity mass protests forced the Iraqi pro-U.S. ruling elite to publicly criticize the U.S.-backed war amid widespread anti-U.S. sentiment, led to accuse the Semite-to-the-bones Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of being an 'anti-Semite' during his recent visit to Washington, and mobilized U.S.-led Iraqi forces to raid leaders of the anti-U.S. and Israeli protests in Baghdad.

The U.S.-backed Israeli war on Lebanon has resonated into cracks in the Iraqi political status quo: First it shook the sectarian base of power of the ruling elites and questioned their pro-U.S. affiliation. The hundreds of thousands who poured onto the streets of the Shiite holy cities of Basra, Najaf, Karbala and Samarra as well as Baghdad were Iraqi Shiite Muslims whose majority was misled by their leading political hopefuls to distance themselves from the national resistance to the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of their country.

Second it showed a divide within this sectarian base of power between an Arab-oriented and an Iranian-influenced sectarian leaderships. The divide had in fact bloodily surfaced in the early stages of the U.S.-British invasion in fierce battles in the Shiite holy cities in

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southern Iraq. The political instinct for survival led the rebellious Arab-oriented Shiite leadership to accept being incorporated into the so-called "political process," thus rendering its anti-occupation slogans less credible, not to say hollow.

Third the war on Lebanon led to a hard-to-conceal diverging views, at least in public, between the U.S. occupying power and the Iraqi government, which the Americans are doing their best to secure in Baghdad. When Al-Maliki addressed a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress on July 26 he condemned Israel's offensive, refused to condemn Hizbollah or to agree it was a "terrorist" organization, although many members tried to embarrass him, leading Democratic Party chairman Howard Dean to call him an "anti-Semite."

Similarly President Jalal Talabani and Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi made comments critical of the "horrible massacres carried out by Israeli aggression." (2) Obviously the three of them were accommodating the public anti-U.S. sentiment to retain some political credibility, although there is no reason to doubt the credibility of the sectarian credentials of al-Maliki and Abdul-Mahdi to identify with a Shiite group like Hizbollah, in spite of the contradictory political agendas and alliances.

Accordingly the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice could not be fooled into a public dispute with them, played down their public rhetoric, and confirmed that the Iraqi prime minister and government remained assets "on the right side in the war on terror." (3)

Before al-Maliki's speech Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd, told U.S. lawmakers that Iraq had joined some other Arab League nations in criticizing Hizbollah's attacks on Israel. Fourth the Iraqi mass protests have the potential to ignite a mass political movement against the US occupation, already bogged down in Iraq by the "armed resistance."

However the "cracks" cannot be exaggerated and leaders on both sides of the divide remain hostage to their sectarian loyalties, thus ruling out any imminent outbreak with their alliances that could make a difference in the Iraqi national resistance to the U.S.-led occupation.

The "Shiite" Hizbollah identifies more with the reportedly "Sunni" Iraqi national resistance and its Palestinian counterpart than with the reportedly "Shiite" collaboration with the U.S. occupation of Iraq. It was noteworthy that since Israel launched its air, sea and ground offensive on his country the Hizbollah leader who has turned into a popular Pan-Arab icon, Hasan Nassrullah, has lashed out at and ruled out any future "American" government in Lebanon, indirectly slamming the pro-American government in Iraq. Earlier he had publicly hailed the Iraqi resistance without directly criticizing the collusion of his co-religious "brothers."

The Iraqi sectarian-led mass protests were politically hollow because they were not reinforced by either anti-occupation political or concrete moves on the ground.

It was ironic to listen to the thousands of protesters sincerely chanting anti-American slogans and announcing their willingness "to go and fight in Lebanon" while the troops of the "American enemy" were a few meters away guarding against the protests

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spelling out of control against them and their Iraqi allies. Those slogans could have been more credible had just a few of the protesters dared to demand their leaders to overcome their sectarian loyalties and join their Sunni compatriots in resisting the foreign occupation.

Al-Sadr Has a Role

in-waiting

For example the Sadrist movement, the main leading force behind the protests, could have gained national credibility by at least quitting its five cabinet posts and the 30 seats it holds in the Iraqi parliament, which prop up al-Maliki government, whose spokesmen are day and night hailing the Americans as the liberators, allies and friends of the Iraqi people, thus prolonging the occupation.

The silent voice of the Sunni-led Iraqi national resistance was much more louder in its solidarity with the Shiite-led Lebanese resistance than the deafening shouts of the protesters.

The disillusion is on the rise.

‘The government formed after the fall of the (Saddam Hussein-led Baath) regime hasn’t been able to do anything, just make many promises. And people are fed up with the promises,’ said Sheikh Bashir al Najafi, a senior Shiite leader. ‘One day we will not be able to stop a popular revolution.’ (4)

Similarly Amman al Janafi, a 39-year-old dentist from Najaf, criticized Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani for urging Shiites to vote for the U.S.-engineered Iraqi constitution and participate in the last elections. ‘The failure of the Islamist political parties broke the trust between the Marjaiyyah [the Shiite Leader’s Council] and the people. Even if Ayatollah Sistani himself were nominated in the next elections, I would not vote for the slate.’ (5)

The Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr is very well positioned to play a historic role should he overcome his sectarian loyalties and his personal anti-Baath vengeance to give priority to the national resistance to foreign occupation. It is a reason for high eyebrows that he advocated ‘armed struggle’ against Saddam Hussein, but is opting for ‘peaceful’ and ‘democratic’ opposition to the occupying power.

Only such an option would reinforce real national unity, pave the way for real national reconciliation, abort the U.S.-British sectarian plans to disintegrate Iraq, shorten the plight of the Iraqi people and bring the overdue peace sooner than later by withdrawing the so-called Shiite smokescreen for perpetuating the foreign occupation.

Moreover, it will unmask foreign exploitation of the Shiite tradition inside Iraq and consequently relax the regional sectarian tension outside Iraq, a tension fomented by various foreign provocateurs. Such an option is also a political survival outlet for al-Sadr, who is obviously targeted not only by his sectarian rivals but more importantly by the occupying powers.

In a report leaked to the media recently, outgoing British ambassador to Iraq, William Patey, warned that ‘preventing [al-Sadr’s] Jaish al-Mahdi from developing into a state within a state, as Hezbollah has done in Lebanon, will be a priority.’

Could Sayed Moqtada free himself from a sectarian captivity to deliver and survive?

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Only time will tell. However, the apparent contradiction between the words and deeds of the sectarian anti-occupation rhetoric would in no time leave the sectarian leaders without any popular base of power, given the growing disillusion, the continued occupation of Iraq, a stateless government besieged in Baghdad's Green Zone, the ever-deteriorating security situation, a looming sectarian civil war, the growing disillusion of the public with the U.S.-installed order of life, the widespread abject poverty, the mushrooming corruption, the absence of basic public services, the suspended national sovereignty, and the ever growing national resistance.

The salvation of Iraq and the Iraqis is national and Pan-Arab, because the Arabs remain the vital heart of Islam, regardless of sect. Islam's messenger and prophet was Arab. Arabic was the language of Islam's message. Arabs disseminated Islam in the four directions of the globe and remain the custodians of the message of peace. If skeptics doubt these facts of history, they should at least consult the geopolitics.

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Notes(1) Los Angeles Times on August 5, 2006.(2) Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi. (3) Rice on American television's "Meet the Press" program. Roman">(4) Comments to journalists from McClatchy Newspapers on August 1. (5) Los Angeles Times on August 5, 2006.