

Nov 04, 2016 by [Gordon Robison](#)

Iraq: The Wrong Path... Again ^[1]

Amman, Jordan

Earlier this week the New York Times carried a long article about American preparations for next month's Iraqi elections. The piece focused on a plan, currently being considered by the United States, to guarantee a certain number of seats in Iraq's National Assembly and/or its cabinet to Sunni Arabs regardless of the result of the actual vote.

The idea is to ensure Sunni representation in the next government despite the fact that violence in predominantly Sunni areas may make voting there impossible. Even if polling can take place in places like Fallujah, Ramadi and Ba'Qubba there may be relatively few representative Sunnis for whom to vote. The influential (Sunni) Muslim Scholars Association long-ago announced a boycott of the election. On Monday the Iraqi Islamic Party, the largest Sunni political organization in the country announced it, too, will boycott. Party leader Mohsin Abdul Hamid told reporters the groups list of "demands" (including a six month postponement of the election) had not been met, so it was pulling out.

So even if Sunni voters can safely reach the polls there may be no one on the ballot representing their communal interests. The result may be a government consisting almost entirely of Shiites and Kurds and an acceleration of the country's downward spiral of violence. If post-election Iraq proves to be an even bigger mess than pre-election Iraq it will be that much harder for the US to pull out and bring its troops home.

Under the circumstances it would be irresponsible of Washington not to be thinking through post-election scenarios. The problem, as usual, is the way we are going about it. The Times piece noted almost in passing "It was not known whether Ayad Allawi, the Iraqi Prime Minister, had been consulted about the possibility of taking such action."

A few paragraphs later Colin Powell was quoted saying the State Department has set up a "war room" to monitor election developments in Iraq and to, in the paper's words, "spread the word to Iraqis" that next month's planned elections are the way to express whatever grievances they may have.

And so, here we are again. If Washington is thinking about jiggering the results of the election, negotiating its plans to do so with Ayatollah Sistani (another claim made in the Times piece), running its own pro-election propaganda operation and may or may not have told the Allawi government about all of this what is any reasonable person to conclude except that Washington still wants to have it both ways? A sovereign Iraq with a real government, but one in which political decisions of any real consequence are taken in Washington (or at least by Americans). It is hard for anyone to look at this and not conclude that the administration is trying to stage manage the results of the election.

Iraqis are not stupid. The election may be getting little attention in America, but Iraqis are

certainly following all this, as are many others elsewhere in the region. Washington might even get the Iraqi government it wants at the end of the day, but when it has no legitimacy either at home or abroad and when the insurgency continues neither our friends nor the United Nations will be any more inclined to help us out of our own mess than they are now. In seeking to 'manage' Iraq's vote we are, I fear, simply headed further into our own downward spiral. If we ever want to get out of Iraq a good place to start would be simply to let the Iraqis vote, resolving to live with the result rather than indulging in vain (and transparent) attempts to control it.

grr
