

Demonstrations in Kirkuk

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Iraq's Return to the Old Legacy under American Tutelage

(August 4, 2008) After decades of suppression under Saddam's tyrannical regime, the post-Saddam era brought new hope for Iraq's multi-ethnic/religious society. The Kurdish leadership was at the forefront to call for national reconciliation and played a crucial role in drafting a new constitution where all ethnic, religious, and individual rights were protected and all citizens were equal before the law.

While the Kurds have been working diligently to make this new era a federal political system where all citizens and stakeholders in society were equally represented in a functioning state under the rule of law, the "Arab brothers" occasionally fell short in promoting mutual understanding on building a functioning democratic Iraq. They have dragged their feet in honoring the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution of which they were signatories. Instead of finding a means of power sharing among the various ethnic and religious groups, they have been continuing the same inhumane tactics which are the legacy of the chauvinist mentality which brought Iraq to its knees. The vestiges of Saddam's legacy remain untouched when it comes to the Kurds and their legitimate national and democratic rights.

Sadly, all this is happening under America's watch. Despite the fact that America has been engaged in dismantling and rebuilding Iraq to make it the "beacon of democracy" for the entire Middle East, America has never pragmatically addressed a solution to the Kurdish issue in Iraq. Occasionally, America has given lip service to this complex problem. But it is ironic that, in an era where the issues of genocide and forced displacement of populations such as the Serbs' genocide against the Bosnians and the genocide of the Sudanese in Darfur have evoked international outrage and criminal court indictments, the parallel situation and history of the Kurds is effaced by American realpolitik and America stands silent and complicit in blocking restitution for the legitimate grievances of the Kurds.

For America to make Iraq a viable state under a functioning democracy, America should play its role as an honest broker and promote a fair system of resettlement of those who were forcibly displaced in other areas in Kurdistan and particularly in Kirkuk to correct the forced de jure policy of Saddam Hussein.

The recent secret ballot voting in the Iraqi Parliament left no doubt about the narrow-mindedness of the Arab chauvinists and their intention to return Iraq back to the old dark

days where fear and distrust nurtured the political mentality in Baghdad. Their refusal to continue with the established open voting procedure in the matter of Kirkuk signaled the intent of members of the parliament to refuse to acknowledge the sustained history of manufactured demographic change of Kirkuk.

For the Iraqi Arab leadership to find a path to a more prosperous future, they must accept the reality in which Iraqi multi-ethnic society lives. They cannot continue to play the role of the old guards of Uroobah (Arabism) and only give lip service to "equal identity" in Iraq. They cannot bring peace to Iraq by acting only on their mono-Arab identity without accepting the Kurdish reality and their legitimate national claims in Iraq. And to correct its past two betrayals of the Kurds who are nonetheless America's most loyal friends in Iraq, America should not maintain its complacent position. Leaving the Kurdish issue unresolved while America could broker a solution will mark its third betrayal. Further, it will remind the world of America's cynical policy concerning the Kurds. America must act on its values and help Iraq's infant democracy grow into a full functioning federal system where all identities are equally represented and empowered.

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