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Special Report

What they're not telling you about the 'election'

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BAGHDAD, Feb. 1, 2005 ([Dahr Jamail's Iraq Dispatches](#))—The day of blood and elections has passed, and the blaring trumpets of corporate media hailing it as a successful show of “democracy” have subsided to a dull roar.

After a day which left 50 people dead in Iraq, both civilians and soldiers, the death toll was hailed as a figure that was “lower than expected.” Thus . . . acceptable by Bush Administration/corporate media standards. After all, only one of them was an American, the rest were Iraqis civilians and British soldiers.

The gamble of using the polling day in Iraq to justify the ongoing failed occupation of Iraq has apparently paid off, if you watch only mainstream media.

“Higher than expected turnout,” US mainstream television media blared, some citing a figure of 72 percent, others 60 percent.

What they didn't tell you was that this figure was provided by Farid Ayar, the spokesman for the Independent Electoral Commission for Iraq (IECI) before the polls had even closed.

When asked about the accuracy of the estimate of voter turnout during a press conference, Ayar backtracked on his earlier figure, saying that a closer estimate was lower than his initial estimate and would be more like 60 percent of registered voters.

The IECI spokesman said his previous figure of 72 percent was “only guessing” and “was just an estimate,” which was based on “very rough, word-of-mouth estimates gathered informally from the field. It will take some time for the IECI to issue accurate figures on turnout.”

Referencing both figures, Ayar then added, “Percentages and numbers come only after counting and will be announced when it's over . . . It's too soon to say that those were the official numbers.”

But this isn't the most important misrepresentation the mainstream media committed.

What they also didn't tell you was that of those who voted, whether they be 35 percent or even 60 percent of registered voters, were not voting in support of an ongoing US occupation of their country.

In fact, they were voting for precisely the opposite reason. Every Iraqi I have spoken with who voted explained that they believe the National Assembly which will be formed soon will signal an end to the occupation.

And they expect the call for a withdrawing of foreign forces in their country to come sooner rather than later.

This causes one to view the footage of cheering, jubilant Iraqis in a different light now, doesn't it?

But then, most folks in the US watching CNN, FOX, or any of the major networks won't see it that way. Instead, they will hear what Mr. Bush said, "The world is hearing the voice of freedom from the center of the Middle East," and take it as fact because most of the major media outlets aren't scratching beneath film clips of joyous Iraqi voters over here in the land of daily chaos and violence, no jobs, no electricity, little running water and no gasoline (for the Iraqis anyhow).

And Bush is portrayed by the media as the bringer of democracy to Iraq by the simple fact that this so-called election took place, botched as it may have been. Appearances suggest that the majority Shia in Iraq now finally get their proportional representation in a "government." Looks good on paper.

But as you continue reading, the seemingly altruistic reasons for this election as portrayed by the Bush Administration and trumpeted by most mainstream media are anything but.

And Iraqis who voted are hearing other trumpets that are blaring an end to the occupation.

Now the question remains, what happens when the National Assembly is formed and over 100,000 US soldiers remain on the ground in Iraq with the Bush Administration continuing in its refusal to provide a timetable for their removal?

What happens when Iraqis see that while there are already four permanent US military bases in their country, rather than beginning to disassemble them, more bases are being constructed, as they are, by Cheney's old company Halliburton, right now?

Antonia Juhasz, a *Foreign Policy in Focus* scholar, authored a piece just before the "election" that sheds light on a topic that has lost attention amidst the recent fanfare concerning the polls in Iraq.

Oil.

I think it's worth including much of her story here, as it fits well with today's topic of things most folks aren't being told by the bringers of democracy to the heart of the Middle East.

On Dec. 22, 2004, Iraqi Finance Minister Abdel Mahdi told a handful of reporters and industry insiders at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. that Iraq wants to issue a new oil law that would open Iraq's national oil company to private foreign investment. As Mahdi explained: "So I think this is very promising to the American investors and to American enterprise, certainly to oil companies."

In other words, Mahdi is proposing to privatize Iraq's oil and put it into American corporate hands.

According to the finance minister, foreigners would gain access both to "downstream" and "maybe even upstream" oil investment. This means foreigners can sell Iraqi oil and own it under the ground—the very thing for which many argue the U.S. went to war in the first place.

As Vice President Dick Cheney's Defense Policy Guidance report explained back in 1992, "Our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the [Middle East] region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil."

While few in the American media other than Emad McKay of Inter Press Service reported on—or even attended—Mahdi's press conference, the announcement was made with U.S. Undersecretary of State Alan Larson at Mahdi's side. It was intended to send a message—but to whom?

It turns out that Abdel Mahdi is running in the Jan. 30 elections on the ticket of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIR), the leading Shiite political party. While announcing the selling-off of the resource which provides 95 percent of all Iraqi revenue may not garner Mahdi

many Iraqi votes, but it will unquestionably win him tremendous support from the U.S. government and U.S. corporations.

Mahdi's SCIR is far and away the front-runner in the upcoming elections, particularly as it becomes increasingly less possible for Sunnis to vote because the regions where they live are spiraling into deadly chaos. If Bush were to suggest to Iraq's Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi that elections should be called off, Mahdi and the SCIR's ultimate chances of victory will likely decline.

I'll add that the list of political parties Mahdi's SCIR belongs to, The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), includes the Iraqi National Council, which is led by an old friend of the Bush Administration who provided the faulty information they needed to justify the illegal invasion of Iraq, none other than Ahmed Chalabi.

It should also be noted that interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi also fed the Bush Administration cooked information used to justify the invasion, but he heads a different Shia list which will most likely be getting nearly as many votes as the UIA list.

And The UIA has the blessing of Iranian born revered Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Sistani issued a fatwa which instructed his huge number of followers to vote in the election, or they would risk going to hell.

Thus, one might argue that the Bush administration has made a deal with the SCIR: Iraq's oil for guaranteed political power. The Americans are able to put forward such a bargain because Bush still holds the strings in Iraq.

Regardless of what happens in the elections, for at least the next year during which the newly elected National Assembly writes a constitution and Iraqis vote for a new government, the Bush administration is going to control the largest pot of money available in Iraq (the \$24 billion in U.S. taxpayer money allocated for the reconstruction), the largest military and the rules governing Iraq's economy. Both the money and the rules will, in turn, be overseen by U.S.-appointed auditors and inspector generals who sit in every Iraqi ministry with five-year terms and sweeping authority over contracts and regulations. However, the one thing which the administration has not been unable to confer upon itself is guaranteed access to Iraqi oil—that is, until now.

And there is so much more they are not telling you. Just like the Iraqis who voted, believing they did so to bring an end to the occupation of their country.