

Poster War

Leading up to the December voting in Iraq

Riverbend is a 26-year-old Iraqi woman making blog entries since 2003 under a pseudonym. This excerpt is from her last entry, Dec. 15. See riverbendblog.blogspot.com

Elections have been all we hear about for the last 10 days at least. The posters are everywhere in Baghdad. There are dozens of parties running for elections, but there are about four or five "lists" which stand out from the rest:

National Iraqi (731): Ayad Allawi's list, which now includes some other prominent puppets including Adnan Al-Pachachi, Ghazi Al-Yawir, Safiya Al-Suhail, etc. Ayad Allawi is a secular Shia, CIA-affiliated, ex-Ba'athist.

Unified Iraqi Coalition List (555): Hakim, Ja'affari and various other pro-Iran fundamentalists, in addition to Sadrists.

Kurdistani Gathering (730): Barazani, Talbani and a few other parties.

Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (667): Mainly Sunni, secular list – includes the Iraqi Christian Democratic Party and is headed by Salih Al-Mutlag.

Iraqi Alliance Front (618): Mainly Sunni Islamic parties.

We've been flooded with election propaganda this last week. Every Iraqi channel you turn to is showing one candidate or another. Allawi, Hakim and a handful of others dominate the rest though. No one is bothering much with the other lists because quite frankly, no one hears of them that often. Allawi's face is everywhere, as is Hakim's turbaned head. It's disconcerting to scan a seemingly innocent wall and have a row of identical Hakims smiling tightly down on you.

The last press conference I watched of Hakim was a few days ago. He was warning his followers of electoral fraud, which is slightly ironic considering his group has been accused of all sorts of fraud this last year. The audience was what caught my interest. The women were sitting on one side of the audience and the men were sitting on the other side, the sexes separated by a narrow aisle. The women all wore black abayas and headscarves. It could have been a scene out of Teheran.

Some of Allawi's campaign posters show him and Safiya Al-Suhail. I can only guess Safiya being used in his campaign posters is meant as a gesture to Iraqi women who have felt more oppressed this year than ever. The problem is that if there's one woman Iraqi females can't relate to – it's Safiya Suhail. She's the daughter of some tribal leader who was assassinated abroad in the '80s or '70s – I'm not sure. She was raised in Lebanon and when she's on TV she comes across as arrogant, huffy and awkward with her Iraqi accent tainted with the Lebanese dialect.

It's a poster war. One day, you see the posters of Allawi, featuring Safiya Suhail, the next day, Allawi's big face is covered with pictures of Hakim and Sistani. Allawi's supporters have been complaining that Hakim's supporters were sabotaging campaign posters.

Even SMS [text] messages are all about voting lately. (Several rather vulgar jokes about list 555 – I can't go into it on the blog, but Iraqis know what I'm talking about).

Secular nationalists are leaning towards Salih Al-Mutlag (of list 667) who is seen as less of a puppet than the rest. After all, he is the only heading one of the more popular electoral lists who wasn't blessed by the American Army and Bremer when Iraq was invaded in 2003. He supports armed resistance (but not terrorism) and he has a group of prominent anti-occupation nationalists backing him. There's talk that after elections, his list will support Allawi to strengthen the secular movement.

The incident of the day yesterday was news of a tanker or truck that had been caught in the town of Wassit full of fake voting ballots from Iran. There is also news that voting centers haven't been properly equipped in several Sunni provinces. There was a skirmish between Iraqi National Guard and the electoral committee to preside over elections in Salah Al-Din.

More people are going to elect this time around – not because Iraqis suddenly believe in American-imposed democracy under occupation, but because the situation this last year has been intolerable. Hakim and Ja'affari and their minions have managed to botch things up so badly, Allawi is actually looking acceptable in the eyes of many. I still can't stand him.

Allawi is still an American puppet. His campaign posters, and the horrors of the last year, haven't changed that. People haven't forgotten his culpability in the whole Fallujah debacle. For some Iraqis, however, he's preferable to Hakim and Ja'affari after a year of detentions, abductions, assassinations and secret torture prisons.

There's a saying in Iraq which people are using right and left lately, and that I've used before in the blog, "Illi ishuf il mout, yirdha bil iskhuna." He who sees death, is content with a fever. Allawi et al. seem to be the fever these days...

EDITOR'S NOTE: The final results of the Dec. 15 Iraqi election are still to be debated. Early polling shows Shiites winning in Baghdad, but Sunni Arabs are claiming major voting fraud.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

sion and profit much less than the gift of an intact temperate rainforest given to our children.

Anthony Willey
Cottage Grove

DUMB OR EVIL

Regarding the current voter choice, the way I see it at this point is that we have a choice of two kinds of government; dumb or evil.

Perhaps dumb isn't exactly the correct word. Too many Democrats are either dumb or gutless. Either way it works out the same. With all the polls showing the Republicans gasping for air, the Democrats still haven't figured out what to do about it! I could go on about all the issues they're missing the boat on, but I think we all know what they are.

And what about leadership that virtually condones torture, indulges in disastrous preemptive war, pummels the neediest with budget cuts while stroking the richest 5 to 10 percent with tax cuts, and so on, and so on. If this isn't evil then it's the best definition of despotism I can think of.

So there we have it: Dumb or evil, which will it be? Dumb government will make costly mistakes in the name of compassion, but evil government can and often will get you killed.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather be broke than dead.

John DeLeau
Springfield

GRINCH REPORT?

A tribute to Dr. Seuss:

The headlines did say the news is as such/ Budget cuts are coming and they will be much! The Seniors will have less finding for nursing home care and it's back to work for single parents on welfare/ Deadbeat parents who fail to pay for child support go free/ What more damage could there be?

Student college fund money/ biggest cut in history / Why I'm feeling so glum is no mystery!/ Home health service payments in a pinch/ this MUST be the work of a GRINCH!

This horrible trend, this social programs cutting binge/ Has basic care for people become part of the fringe?

While some fight about what holiday name to be calling/ Is it just me, or do others find the budget cuts appalling?

Fran Gillespie
Eugene



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