IRAQ

Background

Under the leadership of President Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. An international coalition authorised by the United Nations expelled Iraq from Kuwait by February 1991. This event promoted distrust of Iraq amongst the international community and concern was expressed that Iraq was working to develop weapons of mass destruction.

The UN Security Council required the regime to surrender its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and submit to UN inspections. When the regime refused to fully cooperate with the UN inspections, the Security Council passed a series of Chapter VII sanctions to prevent further WMD development and compel Iraqi adherence to international obligations.

Citing Iraq’s failure to comply with UN inspections (but without a UN mandate), a US and UK led coalition invaded Iraq in March 2003 and removed the regime, leading to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein

Iraq came under the control of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) which was set up on 21 April. In July 2003, the CPA appointed the Iraqi Governing Council to serve as the country’s provisional government (although it was subject to CPA control in a number of ways). In June 2004, the CPA handed Iraqi sovereignty over to another appointed council, the Iraqi Interim Government.

According to the UK Government’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office “over succeeding years, despite a serious insurgency and widespread sectarian violence, Iraq became progressively more independent and more democratic”1.

Iraq progressively regained control of the country’s security too. Starting with Muthanna Province in July 2006, coalition forces handed over control of security to the Iraqi authorities, province by province. The last British troops left Iraq in May 2011; the last US troops left the country in December of the same year.

The Political Situation in Iraq2

In January 2005, a Transitional National Assembly (TNA) was elected. In December 2005, national elections for a new Iraqi parliament (the Council of Representatives) took place under a new constitution (which had been put to a referendum in October 2005 and adopted). In May 2006, Nuri al-Maliki took office as Prime Minister.

In all, 6,529 candidates representing 86 parties were vying for seats in the 2010 elections. The Election Commission rejected the candidature of nearly 500 candidates because of their alleged ties to the dissolved Baath Party (the former ruling party under Saddam Hussein's regime).


2 http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2151.htm
Most parties ran on a similar platform, focusing on the security situation in the country. Prime Minister al-Maliki's State of Law coalition pledged to provide better services and security and to work towards reconciliation and reconstruction.

Despite numerous threats from extremists, including Al-Qaida, to disrupt elections, 62.4 per cent of the 18.9 million registered voters in Iraq turned out at the polls on 7 March. Some 100,000 of the 1.3 million Iraqi nationals abroad registered to vote in 2010. They voted in 16 countries (see note 3).

Even with the enhanced security measures, several blasts killed nearly 40 people on polling day.

The United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) sent election observers. The UN congratulated the Iraqi people and the government of holding successful elections. The EU stated that the elections had shown "the commitment of the Iraqi people to a democratic Iraq". They both praised the high turnout.

The final results gave 91 seats to Iyad Allawi's Iraqi National Accord, two more than Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law coalition. The Iraqi National Alliance and the Kurdish Alliance took 70 and 43 seats respectively. In all, 82 women were elected.

On 14 June, the newly elected Council of Representatives held its first session, chaired by Acting Speaker, Mr. Fuad Masum. He said there was a need for further consultations among the blocs and deputies to elect a Speaker, and ended the session by stating "the session will remain open and we will resume it later on". Consultations remained deadlocked, and on 24 October the Supreme Court ordered the Council of Representatives to reconvene to elect a new Speaker and a government.

Elections for a new Council of Representatives were held in March 2010. Following protracted negotiations, an inclusive government of national unity took office under Nuri al-Maliki in December 2010.

The Future

In January 2012, the former US Presidential Candidate Senator John McCain told CBS' Face the Nation that; "the situation in Iraq is "unraveling" due to recent U.S. foreign policy actions there - and that a "very chaotic situation" could give way to a rise in Iranian influence in the region."³

Senator McCain argued that the recent U.S. military drawdown from Iraq is creating a dire situation in that country, he said;

"It's unraveling because we didn't keep residual force there, because the President of the United States pledged to get out of Iraq," McCain said. "We could have kept a residual force there and kept some stability. And instead it's unraveling, and Iran's influence is increasing and there's every possibility you could see a very chaotic situation there."

An article published in the New York Times published in April this year backed up Senator McCain’s view. It stated:

“Violence and political instability have escalated across Iraq since the withdrawal of American forces, as political and sectarian factions have fought for power and influence in a struggle that, within weeks, threatened to undo the stability that allowed the pullout in the first place.”

….In January 2012, the advocacy group Human Rights Watch said the Americans had left behind a “budding police state,” with the country’s Shiite leadership increasingly ruling by force and fear. Insurgent groups have also stepped up attacks in the face of rising instability.

The turmoil comes at a time when Iraqis had hoped their leaders would be emboldened by their new independence to tackle the nation’s multitude of problems — finally confronting the social, economic and religious divisions that were papered over by the presence of American troops.

But while there remains hope that Iraqis can still unite, the country is far from the “sovereign, stable and self-reliant” place that President Obama described at the time of the American military withdrawal.

The criticisms from Human Rights Watch were released in their annual report on human rights in various countries. The group said that the Iraqi government had significantly restricted freedom of expression in the nation over the past year and that security forces had intimidated, beaten and detained activists, demonstrators and journalists.

At the same time, Al Qaeda has increased its attacks. On three different days in the month since the withdrawal, the daily death toll rose past 60, and on more than a dozen days the toll was more than 10. Without the help of American Special Operations forces, the Iraqi military and police forces have appeared unable to curb attacks on religious pilgrims, civilians and security officers.”

The withdrawal of American troops has seen a resurfacing of political and sectarian conflict. Whilst this no longer makes the headlines it once did in Western media, the situation in Iraq appears to be worsening and influence from Iran threatens what was a fragile peace.

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5 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/world/middleeast/iraqi-moves-to-embrace-militia-opens-new-fault-lines.html?ref=global-home