

The proposal JNV has made is for an independent UN Transitional Authority to support that provisional Iraqi government in the process of agreeing a new Iraqi constitution and holding national elections, while providing UN peacekeeping forces to replace US and UK occupation forces. Not a 'UN government'.

The opposition to a 'UN government', which is real, may not be amount to opposition to a 'UN Transitional Authority' in the sense just outlined. Note that in Aug., the US group Physicians for Human Rights reported that 85 per cent of Iraqi people they polled wanted the UN to 'play the lead role' in Iraq. (letter, *New York Times*, 21 Aug., cited in Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, p. 243)

INSECURITY UNDER OCCUPATION

Earlier polls found support among Iraqis for the short-term continuation of the occupation. We suggested that this was based on people's fear of disorder and violence, and a desire for security. In July, 75 per cent of people said Iraq was more dangerous than before the war.

<www.channel4.com/news/2003/07/week_3/16_poll.html>

In Oct.-Nov., the Oxford Research Institute poll found that 'Two thirds of Iraqis regard "regaining public security" as the country's top priority'. (Reuters, 1 Dec.)

The people of Iraq are running out of patience with the occupation, and the slow pace of political change – hence the scramble in Washington to concoct a new pet 'provisional government'.

JNV continues to believe that the occupation must be brought to a rapid conclusion, to be replaced by a UN Transitional Authority, supporting an Iraqi provisional government based on the Governing Council, with a foreign security presence independent of the US and UK – in the shape of UN or Arab League peacekeeping forces. It is unclear whether the latest opinion poll has helped to clarify our understanding of Iraqi attitudes to such a proposal.

[Please also see 'Regime Unchanged' by Milan Rai (Pluto, Sept 2003).]

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THE HUNGER FOR DEMOCRACY

**The First National Opinion Poll in Iraq
JNV Anti-War Briefing 50. 2 December 2003**

NO TRUST IN THE US/UK

'The section on "trust in organisations" will make edifying reading for U.S. and British forces, grappling to bring peace to the country seven months after the war. When asked to rate their confidence in 11 organisations – including Iraq's governing council, the new Iraqi army, the police and the United Nations – the U.S.-led coalition was the least trusted.

'Some 57 percent of those questioned said they had no trust in the U.S.-led coalition and a further 22 percent said they had very little trust. Only eight percent said they had a great deal of confidence in the occupying force.

'The survey, published by independent British research consultancy Oxford Research International (ORI), samples the views of 3,244 Iraqis, interviewed in their own homes in October and early November.' (Reuters, 1 Dec. 2003)

'The study, conducted across Iraq between mid-October and mid-November, also showed that almost three-quarters of respondents lack confidence in the American-led Coalition Provisional Authority.' (News Corporation, news.com.au, 2 Dec.) 'Regarding the Coalition Provisional Authority, led by U.S. administrator L. Paul Bremer, 43.5 percent of those questioned expressed no confidence, and 29.9 percent said they had not very much confidence.' (Associated Press, 2 Dec.)

IRAQI CYNICISM

A Gallup poll in Baghdad in early Sept. found that only 5 per cent of those polled believed the US invaded Iraq 'to assist the Iraqi people'; only 1 per cent believed it was to establish democracy. **'Forty-three percent of the respondents said they believed that U.S. and British forces invaded in March primarily "to rob Iraq's oil."** 4 percent believed the purpose was to destroy weapons of mass destruction, the primary reason given by the Bush administration.'

‘Three-quarters of those polled said they believed the policies and decisions of the Iraqi Governing Council – whose members were appointed in July by Coalition Provisional Authority Administrator L. Paul Bremer – were “mostly determined by the coalition’s own authorities,” and only 16 percent thought the council members were “fairly independent”.’

‘Although 52 percent of those polled said they thought the United States was serious about establishing a democratic system of government in Iraq, **51 percent said Washington would not allow Iraqis to do that without U.S. pressure and influence.**’ (*Washington Post*, 12 Nov., p. A18) (1,178 Baghdadis, 28 Aug.– 4 Sept.)

As noted in a previous JNV Anti-War Briefing, a previous US poll in Iraq found that, ‘Asked whether in the next five years the US would “help” Iraq, 35.3 per cent said yes while **50 per cent said the US would “hurt” Iraq.**’ (FT, 11 Sept., p. 11)

DEMOCRACY

‘Regarding their future, 90.3 per cent of interviewees said they somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that the country needed an Iraqi democracy.’ (AP, 2 Dec.) This is quite a turn-around from earlier polls, which showed luke-warm support for democracy. It may be that the public perception of what the word ‘democracy’ means has shifted.

38.2 per cent of Iraqi people polled in Aug. said democracy could work well in Iraq, while 50.2 per cent said ‘democracy is a western way of doing things and it will not work here.’ (FT, 11 Sept., p.11) In an even earlier Baghdad poll, multi-party democracy was chosen by only 36 per cent of people polled; 50 per cent opted for one of the five variants of Islamic, presidential or single-party rule.

www.channel4.com/news/2003/07/week_3/16_poll.html

In the new poll, ‘only around a fifth of Iraqis questioned said they trust political parties... Some 71 per cent of respondents declined to mention any party they would vote for, while those who did mentioned 38 different political parties.’ (news.com.au, 2 Dec.)

‘More than four out of five people said democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. And almost 90 percent said the government must represent all the main groups in their ethnically and religiously divided society.’ So reported Voice of America, the official US propaganda machine, which bravely tried to spin the story as ‘Iraqi Public Opinion Poll Finds Overwhelming Support for Democratic

Future’, downplaying the facts that (a) the poll found overwhelming opposition to the US occupation and (b) the US government was the main obstacle to a ‘democratic future’ in Iraq (see forthcoming JNV Briefing, *The Sovereignty Shell Game*).

RELIGION AND THE STRONG MAN

‘But more than two-thirds also wanted a strong leader; slightly fewer (61%) agreed that the government should be made up mainly of religious leaders... In contrast with all other Iraqi institutions, **religious leaders command the trust of the people – though when asked to suggest the best thing that could happen in the next year, fewer than 1% said an Islamic government.**’ (‘Iraqis “welcome Saddam’s fall”’, BBC News Online, 2 Dec.)

‘[W]hile 70 percent of those surveyed said they had confidence in religious leaders, the same number regarded ideas, morality, and “religious guidance” as the responsibility of individuals, not government. “This challenges the assumption that Iraqis want a religious regime,” the authors said.’ (Reuters, 1 Dec.)

‘One of the survey’s most striking findings in a country emerging from dictatorship was that only one in 10 Iraqis thought most people could be trusted; nine out of 10 agreed that you had to be very careful in dealing with people, and nearly half said they would never discuss politics with others.’ (‘Iraqis “welcome Saddam’s fall”’, BBC News Online, 2 Dec.) ‘53.6 per cent strongly agreed that their country needed a single, strong Iraqi leader.’ (News Corporation, news.com.au, 2 Dec.)

A UN TRANSITIONAL AUTHORITY?

‘Only 16.7 per cent said they strongly agreed that Iraq needed a transition UN government.’ (News Corporation, news.com.au, 2 Dec.) 52 per cent said they rejected the idea of a UN government. (Morning Star, 2 Dec., p. 1)

What of the support given in an earlier Briefing for a UN Transitional Authority, reflecting the majority view in over twenty anti-war meetings in Wales, Scotland, England and across the United States (straw polls conducted by Milan Rai during a speaking tour)?

Much depends on the term ‘UN government’. There is a near-consensus in Iraqi political circles that the way forward is to grant sovereignty immediately to the Governing Council, despite the fact that it was appointed by the US Government.