

# US, UN dismiss claims of electoral fraud in Iraq

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The Bush administration, with the endorsement of the United Nations, has dismissed out of hand claims by a range of Sunni Arab-based political parties that the December 15 elections were rigged by the ruling Shiite fundamentalist United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and the Kurdish Alliance (KA).

According to the preliminary vote tally released by the Iraqi electoral commission, the main political party based among the Sunni Arab population, the Accordance Front, has won just 41 seats in the 275-seat parliament. A secular Sunni formation, the National Dialogue Front (NDF), has won only nine. The main policy of both Sunni organisations was the demand for a timetable for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq.

In contrast, the Shiite UIA, which dominates the current puppet government, appears to have won as many as 130 seats. In the southern provinces of Iraq, where adherents of the Shiite branch of Islam are the majority of the population, the UIA received between 80 to 95 percent of the vote. The Shiite coalition also registered an unexpectedly high 61 percent of the vote in Baghdad, winning the majority of the 59 seats allocated to Iraq's most populous province. The Kurdish Alliance, which forms the other component of the regime in Baghdad, appears to have won as many as 52 seats in the predominantly Kurdish northern provinces.

The Sunni organisations say the result was achieved by fraud and widespread intimidation of Sunni voters by the Shiite and Kurdish-dominated Iraqi military and police. In both Ninevah and Diyala provinces, the NDF has accused Kurdish militiamen of threatening Arab voters and physically preventing them entering polling stations. In Baghdad, the Sunni parties have alleged that supporters of the Shiite fundamentalists in the

electoral commission carried out outright ballot-stuffing. Khalaf Elayan, the NDF secretary general, told the *Washington Post* on December 20: "These are not true results. These are forged. We have our numbers through our observers and they differ from those. We have a lot of support in Baghdad. The numbers they gave cannot be true."

Sunni parties have called demonstrations over the past week in Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah, Baquaba and a number of other cities and towns, denouncing the election and demanding a re-run of the ballot. As many as 1,500 formal complaints have been filed with the electoral commission. A spokesman for the Accordance Front, Mahmoud al-Douri, told the *New York Times*: "There is great tension among Arab Sunnis. They feel as if they voted in great numbers but this isn't reflected in the results."

An election official, Abdul Hussein Hendawi, told Associated Press there was concrete evidence of ballot irregularities in the provinces of Baghdad, Ninevah, Diyala, Tamin, Irbil and Anbar. Adding to the anger of the Sunni population, a US-created Iraqi court ruled on December 23 that as many as 90 candidates of the Sunni coalitions and the Iraqi National List were disqualified from being members of parliament on the grounds they had been members of Saddam Hussein's Baathist party.

The most openly pro-US parties received low votes and have also alleged vote-rigging and called for a re-run. The Iraqi National List coalition, assembled by CIA asset and former US-appointed interim prime minister Iyad Allawi, has most likely secured only 25 seats. The Iraqi National Congress (INC) of Ahmed Chalabi, which, along with Allawi and the Kurdish organisations, openly collaborated in the US invasion of Iraq, may not win any seats at all. The INC is

believed to have received less than 30,000 votes—with 40,000 estimated as the minimum necessary to gain a seat. An American advisor to Chalabi, Francis Brooke, told the *Washington Post*: “We are a little surprised that those numbers don’t match the numbers from our poll observers.”

The Bush administration has ignored the chorus of allegations. White House spokesman Trent Duffy told a press conference on December 28: “I don’t think most are suggesting that there needs to be a re-run because it is the belief that the elections were fair. That is our view as well.” The UN, which endorsed the illegal US invasion of Iraq, immediately backed the American position. The UN advisor to the Iraqi electoral commission, Craig Jenness, declared there was “no justification” for a re-run and that the election had been “transparent and credible”.

The reaction by the US and the UN underscores the absurdity of the claim that some type of democracy is being established in Iraq. From the Ukraine to Kyrgyzstan, ballot fraud has been the pretext for US imperialism to denounce regimes that were not considered sufficiently subservient to great power interests and engineer their downfall. In Iraq, however, a rigged election is acceptable providing it facilitates the actual aim of the invasion—the plunder of the country’s oil wealth.

There are serious concerns in Washington over the pro-Iranian sympathies of some of the Iraqi Shiite fundamentalists and the separatist agenda of the Kurdish nationalists. Both have collaborated consistently with the occupation, however, and the preferred candidates of the White House such as Allawi and Chalabi have proven to be incapable of developing any meaningful base of support. The Shiite and Kurdish parties, on the other hand, are able to mobilise sections of the population on the basis of sectarian appeals.

The constitution that the UIA and KA drafted together with the US ambassador in Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, directly facilitates the opening up of Iraq’s state-owned oil industry to US and other foreign companies, in exchange for the Shiite and Kurdish elite gaining the right to establish autonomous regions with control over oil revenues in the resource-rich north and south. The quid pro quo with the US occupation is also reflected in the fact that as many as 90 percent of the members of the Iraqi armed forces being used by the

American military against the predominantly Sunni guerilla resistance were recruited from Shiite and Kurdish militias.

The election virtually guarantees that the next government in Baghdad will be dominated by the Shiite fundamentalists and the Kurdish parties, which will pursue a sectarian agenda. The Sunni parties do not have enough seats to introduce amendments to the constitution, which was one of their primary objectives in standing candidates. The wealth and privileges of the traditional Sunni Arab ruling class, which is concentrated in the central but resource-poor provinces, stemmed from their grip over the Baghdad government after the establishment of the Iraqi nation-state. The US invasion and occupation has not only forced them from political power, but has also stripped them of control over the country’s oil and gas wealth.

The consequences will be an escalation of the tensions that are already plunging the country toward the nightmare of a sectarian civil war. Far from creating conditions for the withdrawal of substantial numbers of US troops, the election also portends an intensification of the guerilla resistance against the occupation forces, and thousands more American casualties. A city councillor in Fallujah, Kamal al-Nazal summed up the alienation and anger among Iraqi Sunnis after the ballot failed to in any way advance their interests: “We went to a wedding, and it turned into a funeral.”

Fighting has returned to pre-election levels already. On Christmas Day, a 70-tonne US Abram tank was destroyed in Baghdad, reportedly by a roadside bomb. At least 59 US troops have been killed so far in December and over 250 wounded.



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