

## MY SAY: Goodbye, 'Eye-raq'

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As the Iraqis busied themselves with election day to determine the future of their country, many were asking what they would be voting for. Freedom? Security? Fortune? Or just another so-called democratic exercise?

They have done this many times since the invasion, but as in other far more stable countries, elections stopped short of delivering "democracy".

Adding to the confusion were statements made by Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown to the Chilcot enquiry last week, and their implications. He said, "It is my regret that I wasn't able to be more successful in pushing the Americans further on this", referring to his failure (and that of his former boss Tony Blair, although Blair was less gutsy about saying it) to make George W Bush heed Britain's warning about the need to prepare for the post-war reconstruction of a "free Eye-raq".

In fact, the British reportedly prepared a reconstruction plan as late as September 2002, which was discussed in a special Cabinet meeting in March 2003 — the fateful month. In other words, despite the "quick" victory over Iraq, there was actually very little to move forward to except more violence and death, as it has been in the past seven years as the country spirals into sectarian clashes and a deepening ethnic divide. Maybe this was the grand plan — refusing to plan for reconstruction.

Especially when Brown declared his suspicions about the US administration's dismissal of the need to plan for Iraq after the invasion predicated on the naive illusion that the population would be overjoyed with the downfall of the regime. Some even promoted the idea that the invading troops would be showered with flowers, and the rest, it seems, would take care of itself. Numerous commercial enterprises from the "coalition of the willing" were preferentially unleashed to grab as many business opportunities as possible, in the hope that the spillover effect would reconstruct Iraq naturally.

Clearly, this is only half true in that the "coalition" siphoned off much of the badly needed wealth for themselves. The general Iraqi population, unfortunately, continues to fight for the crumbs as the prize of "freedom" bestowed on them is riddled with flaws. Still Brown declared: "It was the right decision taken for the right reasons" — quite obviously post-war reconstruction is not one of the right reasons. The question then, how "right" is "right"? And only those who have lost their loved ones in this unjust war, and even more so in its aftermath, can give the verdict.

As one of them pointed out, if there had been no war, all the pain and agony inflicted on innocent bystanders for so many years could have been avoided. "Brown has spent £8.5 billion pursuing an illegal and unwinnable war. He was the paymaster and the second most powerful man in the government," claims Stop the War Coalition. Like the prime minister's suspicions about the US administration, kin of the war victims are equally suspicious of his words. As reminded by an editorial in *The Guardian* (UK, March 6): "Everyone in British politics in 2003 knows that if Mr. Brown had opposed the Iraq war it would not have happened."

In a nutshell, given the current intractable state of affairs in Iraq, the election makes a good alibi for another ploy for a quick exit from the mess created by the invading forces. There is not a lot of time for this to be resolved, with no long-term solutions in sight, let alone a workable one, by the time of the scheduled US withdrawal by the end of August.

After all, there are no institutions strong enough to exert any meaningful influence that would hold the nation together. Not even Parliament at this moment. The death of tens of Iraqis during the election period, and the large numbers of disenfranchised Sunni candidates, is a testimony to how slippery things could be once the election results are in, which may not be anytime soon.

No matter, this time there will be a major difference — the invading forces led by the US will be safely home come what may. While Brown (and maybe his former boss too) can safely claim that if Bush had listened to them on the need to work out a reconstruction plan, things would have been much better for the Iraqis, the ultimate losers will be those left behind after the invaders have gone home.

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