

# Resistance and Iraqi independence Election result signals tough days for Koizumi

TARIQ ALI

SOME weeks ago, Pentagon inmates were invited to a special in-house showing of an old movie. It was the Battle of Algiers, Gillo Pontecorvo's anti-colonial classic, initially banned in France. One assumes the purpose of the screening was purely educative. The French won that battle, but lost the war.

At least the Pentagon understands that the resistance in Iraq is following a familiar anti-colonial pattern. In the movie, they would have seen acts carried out by the Algerian maquis almost half a century ago, which could have been filmed in Fallujah or Baghdad last week. Then, as now, the occupying power described all such activities as "terrorist". Then, as now, prisoners were taken and tortured, houses that harboured them or their relatives were destroyed, and repression was multiplied. In the end, the French had to withdraw.

As American "postwar" casualties now exceed those sustained during the invasion (which cost the Iraqis at least 15,000 lives), a debate of sorts has begun in the US. Few can deny that Iraq under US occupation is in a much worse state than it was under Saddam Hussein. There is no reconstruction. There is mass unemployment. Daily life is a misery, and the occupiers and their puppets cannot provide even the basic amenities of life. The US doesn't even trust the Iraqis to clean their barracks, and so south Asian and Filipino migrants are being used. This is colonialism in the epoch of neo-liberal capitalism, and so US and "friendly" companies are given precedence. Even under the best circumstances, an occupied Iraq would become an oligarchy of crony capitalism, the new cosmopolitanism of Bechtel and Halliburton.

It is the combination of all this that fuels the resistance and encourages many young men to fight. Few are prepared to betray those who are fighting. This is crucially important, because without the tacit support of the population, a sustained resistance is virtually impossible.

The Iraqi maquis have weakened George Bush's position in the US and enabled Democrat politicians to criticise the White House, with Howard Dean daring to suggest a total US withdrawal within two years. Even the bien pensants who opposed the war but support the occupation and denounce the resistance know that

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without it they would have been confronted with a triumphalist chorus from the warmongers. Most important, the disaster in Iraq has indefinitely delayed further adventures in Iran and Syria.

One of the more comical sights in recent months was Paul Wolfowitz on one of his many visits informing a press conference in Baghdad that the "main problem was that there were too many foreigners in Iraq". Most Iraqis see the occupation armies as the real "foreign terrorists". Why? Because once you occupy a country, you have to behave in colonial fashion. This happens even where there is no resistance, as in the protectorates of Bosnia and Kosovo. Where there is resistance, as in Iraq, the only model on offer is a mixture of Gaza and Guantanamo.

Nor does it behove western commentators whose countries are occupying Iraq to lay down conditions for those opposing it. It is an ugly occupation, and this determines the response. According to Iraqi opposition sources, there are more than 40 different resistance organisations. They consist of Ba'athists, dissident communists, disgraced by the treachery of the Iraqi Communist party in backing the occupation, nationalists, groups of Iraqi soldiers and officers disbanded by the occupation, and Sunni and Shia religious groups.

The great poets of Iraq--Saadi Youssef and Mudhaffar al-Nawab--once brutally persecuted by Saddam, but still in exile, are the consciences of their nation. Their angry poems denouncing the occupation and heaping scorn on the jackals--or quislings--help to sustain the spirit of resistance and renewal. Youssef writes:

I'll spit in the jackals' faces  
I'll spit on their lists  
I'll declare that we are the people of Iraq  
We are the ancestral trees of this land.  
And Nawwab:

And never trust a freedom fighter  
Who turns up with no arms  
Believe me, I got burnt in that crematorium

Truth is, you're only as big as your cannons  
While those who wave knives and forks

Simply have eyes for their stomachs.

In other words, the resistance is predominantly Iraqi--though I would not be surprised if other Arabs are crossing the borders to help. If there are Poles and Ukrainians in Baghdad and Najaf, why should Arabs not help each other? The key fact of the resistance is that it is decentralised--the classic first stage of guerrilla warfare against an occupying army. The downing of a US Chinook helicopter follows that same pattern. Whether these groups will move to the second stage and establish an Iraqi National Liberation Front remains to be seen.

As for the UN acting as an "honest broker", forget it--especially in Iraq, where it is part of the problem. Leaving aside its previous record (as the administrator of the killer sanctions, and the backer of weekly Anglo-American bombing raids for 12 years), on October 16 the security council disgraced itself again by welcoming "the positive response of the international community... to the broadly representative governing council... [and] supports the governing council's efforts to mobilise the people of Iraq..." Meanwhile a beaming fraudster, Ahmed Chalabi, was given the Iraqi seat at the UN. One can't help recalling how the US and Britain insisted on Pol Pot retaining his seat for over a decade after being toppled by the Vietnamese. The only norm recognised by the Security Council is brute force, and today there is only one power with the capacity to deploy it. That is why, for many in the southern hemisphere and elsewhere, the UN is the US.

The Arab east is today the venue of a

dual occupation: the US-Israeli occupation of Palestine and Iraq. If initially the Palestinians were demoralised by the fall of Baghdad, the emergence of a resistance movement has encouraged them. After Baghdad fell, the Israeli war leader, Ariel Sharon, told the Palestinians to "come to your senses now that your protector has gone". As if the Palestinian struggle was dependent on Saddam or any other individual. This old colonial notion that the Arabs are lost without a headman is being contested in Gaza and Baghdad. And were Saddam to drop dead tomorrow, the resistance would increase rather than die down.

Sooner or later, all foreign troops will have to leave Iraq. If they do not do so voluntarily, they will be driven out. Their continuing presence is a spur to violence. When Iraq's people regain control of their own destiny they will decide the internal structures and the external policies of their country. One can hope that this will combine democracy and social justice, a formula that has set Latin America alight but is greatly resented by the Empire. Meanwhile, Iraqis have one thing of which they can be proud and of which British and US citizens should be envious: an opposition.

Tariq Ali is a world-renowned political activist and columnist

Courtesy: The Guardian



MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

AT the start of the campaign for last Sunday's lower house election, the leader of Japan's main ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, proclaimed that he would resign if the election result would show a failure on his part to retain the control of the house. But the announcement didn't elaborate what he had in mind by mentioning retaining control. Was it supposed to be the control of the house by his own party that already had a clear majority of 247 seats in the 480-seat lower house? Or, as he also heads the three-party ruling block, did he mean retaining control of the coalition that enjoyed a comfortable majority of 287 seats? In subsequent days of election campaign, despite repeated provocative calls from the opposition camp to clarify what he was really meaning, Koizumi remained silent over the issue and by now must be feeling relieved that he did so.

Japan's three-party ruling coalition has retained control of the lower house of the Diet as a large number of voters all over the country had once again shown their unwillingness to endorse any of the six political parties that contested the poll. The voter turnout in Sunday's election was second lowest in post World War II period, with only 59.86 percent showing up at more than 53 thousand polling stations around the country. But the most significant part of the outcome of voting was the failure of

## CLOSEUP JAPAN

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The LDP to keep the controlling position that it held at the lower house. Failing to win the 241 seats needed to maintain party's overall control would now mean that the party has to depend more on one of its two coalition partners, the New Komei Party, for crucial decisions of the government as well as in planning Japan's much needed economic recovery.

The three-party ruling block has managed to maintain its majority by winning 275 seats, a number with which they can now easily control all standing committees of the lower house. But as the figure is 12 less than what they had before, the victory seems to be not without a setback. As for the LDP, the party lost its position of absolute majority as its total number of seats had fallen four short of the needed figure. Hence, for Koizumi too, the victory has a test of bitterness as voters in Japan had shown their reluctance to give him an outright mandate to go ahead with his policy of structural reform that yet to bring fruits to country's average citizens.

The main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), on the other hand, has secured 177 seats to become the most powerful parliamentary rival of the LDP. As the party held 137 seats before the election, a net gain of 40 can easily be termed as an important success that might eventually pave the way for Japanese democracy to turn into a practice where competition and rivalries of two major parties set the tone of political course. The main opposition's strong show has much to do with the failure of the government to bring desired results of its much talked about economic reform than the appeal of the DPJ and its political platform. The result also shattered the media-nurtured "Koizumi myth" that his charismatic image single handedly counters any opposition offensive to threaten the position of privilege being enjoyed by the LDP.

The Sunday poll was LDP's first lower house election under the guidance of Koizumi. The prime minister called the election almost a year before the scheduled date with the sole intention of reaping the benefit of his populist media image. But the result has now virtually demolished the myth surrounding him, and by doing so, exposed Koizumi to a vulnerable situation that, some analysts are already predicting, might bring his own downfall and with that the end of a confusing era in Japanese politics when superficiality, rather than reality of the situation, dominated the scene.

There is no question that the prime minister will retain his post when the newly elected lower chamber convenes later this month. He is expected to reappoint all his ministers given the fact that the last reshuffle of the cabinet took place only in September. But beyond that cosmetic normalcy in routine political business, uncertainty looms large on long-term basis as a stronger opposition from both within and outside the party could topple his government.

The election result is giving clear indication that Koizumi has lost much of his clout and this will make it much more difficult for him to deal with pressing matters. In the last general election held in 2000, the LDP under the leadership of one of Japan's most unpopular prime minister in recent history, Yoshiro Mori, managed to win 233 seats. Compared to Mori, Koizumi has always been portrayed as a popular, charismatic, forceful and reform-minded leader whom the country needs at the time of crisis. When the prime minister dissolved the lower house and called new election early last month, he had all such equations in his hand and intended to utilise them to his full advantage. Yet, although in success rate he could outshine Mori merely by four parliamentary seats, Koizumi in fact

failed to generate any real interest among people to exercise their voting rights. The voter turnout in Sunday's election, down 2.63 percentage point from the previous one held in 2000, gives Mori a slight edge over the self-proclaimed reformist. Such a poor success rate has virtually shattered the image of Koizumi as an able leader with a vision who can guide Japan at the time of difficulty. It also indicates that whatever the media had earlier repeatedly said about him, the people of Japan didn't take much of that seriously.

Devoid of that earlier populist image, Koizumi in coming days might find it much harder to deal with matters of utmost importance. And for the Japanese leadership, such pressing matters are not only a few. He might find it extremely difficult putting together next fiscal year's budget in December as the resistance forces within the LDP are set to find them stronger than before to protect their interests. The prime minister also has to deal with the unfinished business of privatisation of highways, the issue that puts him straight into loggerhead with the opposing forces within the party. In addition to all that, there also remains the unfinished business concerning his pledge to send troops to Iraq, a potentially damaging issue that might backfire if things go wrong with the Japanese unit in the unfriendly deserts of the Middle East. Finding solutions to such important issues will not be easier any longer for Koizumi as he now faces enemies not only in a revamped opposition, but also among anti-reform lawmakers of his own party who could complicate things by setting off dissent among party rank and file.

Focusing on this reality of situation, a group of political analysts are already suggesting a possible collapse of the Koizumi administration before the next upper house election in 2004. According to them, much would depend on Iraq issue, as any Japanese casualty might turn public sentiment quickly against the administration, resulting in further strengthening the ranks of anti-Koizumi forces within the party. The ruling block might have clinched a collective majority, but at the same time, the election result also makes it difficult for Koizumi to be as self-assertive as he previously had been. As a result, the election marks the start of a completely new phase of Koizumi leadership, which can be otherwise interpreted simply as uncertain days.

# Of human movement and access to Israel's unabated human rights abuse

SAAED KHAN writes from Minnesota, USA

I was watching a fascinating documentary by an English scientist about how Human beings spread around the whole world out of Africa. He is a genetic scientist and he tracked the genes from Africa to South Asia, Australia, Central Asia, Europe and finally America. He depicted how tough the journey was for early human beings to cross continents to get to a place that was expected to be better than the place they left in hope of a better life. The whole concept started a chain of thought by about the difference between those early human settlers and the present day modern humans.

The journey of our ancestors was very tough and sometimes seems almost impossible. The crossing of the extremely cold north to get to the American continent or the crossing of the vast deserts of central Asia seems very difficult even by today's technological standards. Compared to that, think how easy it has become to get to one point of the world from another today. We can cross oceans in matter of hours now. With the advance of technology, the time to cross distances will become shorter and shorter. We have technology like the TV, the phone, and the internet that makes it possible for us to see and communicate with the whole world within seconds. With the advances in science and technology and advancement in other human facets like -- human rights, labour rights, and democracy, one might expect that the day for movement of people from one geographic area to another for more resources and opportunity should end. One might expect that with all the advancements we should by now be able to ensure that resources are shared by people all over with the least amount of barriers. But the reality is exactly the opposite -- presently the world population is probably divided between two extremes as it has ever been in its history -- the people who can access the resources of the world and use them and the people who cannot.

Why did those early people make those difficult journeys despite the difficult terrains and mortal dangers? Was it just adventure, curiosity and thirst for knowledge? Or was there the more immediate reason of survival? Were they forced to consider traveling through unknown territories because their habitat was becoming uninhabitable because of a change in the weather pattern, the lack of agricultural resources, or the lack of other supporting resources? If we look at the history of just the last seven hundred years we can see that the Europeans started to spread out (after the Middle Ages) in search of resources because they needed more resources to support their growing population. They went to different continents that were at that time known for their resources, mainly -- Africa and Asia. They went as traders at first. Then they tried to establish colonies because that

way they could ensure the smooth transfer of resources from those parts of the world. With the advent of shipping and rail technology the people did not need to move to a place for access to resources. Instead the resource could be moved to them.

There are hundreds of stories of an English vagabond with no future and opportunity who left for India and then made a fortune. Even before the Europeans came to Asia there were stories of young men without anything going to a land where there was opportunity and making a good life for themselves. So what we are doing today (going to a different place to work) is not something new in human history. People have been going to where there are resources and opportunity since the beginning of human history. What is different today is that people are unable to do what they have been doing for hundreds of years. They are being forced to stay in a place

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that does not offer any opportunity and that is running out of resources.

The people who took advantage of the days when there was no barrier for practicing their trade in different lands and thus enriched themselves are now preventing (sometimes inhumanly and brutally) the people of the now poorer parts of the world from practicing their trade or working in the parts of the world that offer more opportunity and resources; and there is no sharing of the resources that the rich can access or have accumulated. On the one hand these people preach about a global village and free trade and on the other hand they do their best to prevent people who have no opportunity or resources where they are from going to places where there are opportunities and resources thus preventing them from participating in the global trade and economy. They are so wary of any resource being outside their control that we are seeing a huge hue and cry in certain job sectors as some of those jobs are being sent out to places like India.

The imbalance of resource accessibility in the end results in perpetual poverty and strife. Death, crime, corruption -- every imaginable bad thing -- plagues those confined populations who are not allowed access

to the world's resources and also are being kept from entering the areas of the world where they might get access to these resources and opportunities. When these people try to get out and go to a place that offers a better life they are treated with the utmost indignity and brutality and severest of laws. The richer parts of the world impose extreme measures to control the movement of people from the poorer parts of the globe. These countries lecture everyone about human rights and human dignity when the very laws and regulations they make spell out human indignity and humiliation.

In the old days, the free movement of people prevented the creation of a third world and first world. People naturally went where there was better opportunity. So the resources would eventually be spread out among all people. But in the last 100 years or so this practice is being prevented by some parts of the world population as they are unwilling to share the resources with the rest of the humanity. As a result, we have seen a dramatic increase in wars, battles, regional conflicts, ethnic conflicts, and racial hatred while we have advanced in leaps and bound in science and technology. It seems the desire of the people of one part of the world to dominate the rest of humanity by denying them access to resources and opportunity is becoming more and more apparent everyday. The world is being polarised dramatically (even during the cold war there was not this type of polarization). The resource poor and the resource rich are being pitched against each other in an uneven battle where the poor are resorting to unconventional methods of violence and destruction to make the field even for them. On the other hand the rich are responding with harsher rules, barriers to movement and overwhelmingly technically advanced military force. People are committing suicide en masse (Indian farmers) or in demonstrations (Korean farmer in Cancun) as the situation is getting utterly hopeless.

Every day there is a new law or immigration regulation devised by the rich countries applicable specifically to the people from a list of poor countries. Unless resources are shared with the people from these poor regions, people will always try to come to the rich regions. The same people who are devising these rules and inhuman measures resulting ultimately in the uneven distribution of the resources of the world -- talk about free trade and global village and human rights.

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BILLY I AHMED

THE United Nations Commission of Human Rights has published a report prepared by John Dugard, Special Rapporteur, entitled "Question of the violation of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine." It unfolds the fact that Israeli provocations and oppression have escalated since Ariel Sharon's visit to the al-Aqsa mosque.

The report released in September, is based on Dugard's visits to Gaza and the West Bank in June and July, during which he met with several Palestinian officials and Palestinian and Israeli interlocutors and NGOs, and attended the presentation of Israel's report to the Human Rights Committee.

The report scrutinizes: human rights and terrorism; annexation and Israel's so-called security wall; restrictions on freedom of movement and the humanitarian crisis; loss of life and the killing of civilians; prisoners; destruction of property; and settlements.

In keeping with the UN's general standpoint, Dugard attempts a "balanced" appraisal of the conflict. As a paradigm, he allows that Israel has "legitimate security concerns", but insists that "there must be some limit to the extent to which human rights may be violated in the name of counter-terrorism." Instead the situation is conspicuously so lopsided that he had to judge "Israel's response to terror is disproportionate" and on occasion "so remote from the interests of security that it assumes the character of punishment, humiliation and conquest."

**The wall:** "The wall" being constructed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Likud-led coalition government that purports to keep terrorists out -- is euphemistically referred to as a "security fence" or "Seam Zone". The word "annexation" is avoided because it too accurately describes what is happening through the wall's construction. The final route of the wall is as yet undetermined but on completion it will be between 450 and 650 kilometres long.

In some places the wall is an eight-meter high concrete barrier, but mostly it forms a no-man's-land 60-100 metres wide with buffer zones, trenches, barbed wire, electric fences with sensors, a two-lane patrol road and fortified guard towers. There are also 100-metre wide "no-go" areas on either side patrolled by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF).

Whether the "no go wall" will keep the terrorists from infiltrating remains leery. Even the Israeli State Comptroller noted in July 2002, "IDF documents indicate that most of the suicide terrorists and car bombers crossed the seam area into Israel through the checkpoints."

The wall is built on Palestinian land. It does not follow the so called Green Line, which marks the unofficial boundary between Israel and the proposed Palestin-

ian state, but constantly encroaches six or seven kilometres into Palestinian territory mainly to protect illegal Jewish settlements. A decision taken recently has gone further still and proposes a 20-kilometre loop into Palestinian territory to include the settlements of Ariel, Immanuel and Kedumim.

According to Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* the blocks incorporated in this sweep contain around 80 percent of the settlers in the West Bank. In all, it is thought that as much as half of the 400,000-settler population will be incorporated into Israel. Ha'aretz also reports that approximately 60,000 Palestinians will end up inside this planned loop, on top of the 80,000 that the human rights group B'Tselem estimates will be caught behind the main wall.

The Bush administration has issued only muted criticism referring to the wall as a "problem". President Bush drew a parallel between this and the US "war on terror" stating, "We would be doing the same thing." This comment led Sharon to brow-

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beat saying, "Israel will not be deterred from protecting its citizens and will strike its enemies in every place and in every way."

The serpent like wall comprehensively hooping Palestinian villages or segregating them from the rest of the West Bank, isolates thousands of Palestinians who must waste hours each day passing through checkpoints to get to work or school or hospital. Hundreds of women have been forced to give birth in ambulances delayed at checkpoints, and the report notes that "accounts of rudeness, humiliation and brutality at the checkpoints are legion."

The projected cost of this 'Berlin Wall of Israel' 1.4 billion US dollars.

**Fertile land incorporated:** The Palestinian territory that is incorporated into Israel "consists of fertile agricultural land and some of the most important water wells in the region." It is widely foreseen that a further wall will be constructed to separate the West Bank from the Jordan Valley on the eastern side, thus severely restricting Palestinian access to water.

**Violation of international law:** The report notes that the wall violates two of the most fundamental principles of contemporary international law:

1) The prohibition of the forcible acquisi-

tion of territory,  
2) The right to self-determination.

Annexation by force is defined in international law as "conquest", which is prohibited by both the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 and Article 2, paragraph 4 of the UN Charter. Prohibition of conquest applies to "irrespective of whether the territory is acquired as a result of an act of aggression or in self defence."

**Grabbed hilltops:** The building of illegal settlements in the West Bank has continued since 1967 with a rapid increase in the late 1970s when Ariel Sharon was Housing Minister. It was Sharon who called on settlers to "grab the hilltops of the West Bank" before any final decision was made under the Oslo Peace Accords. The original intention of the settlements was to stoke a claim to the West Bank as Israeli land. The report notes that like "the settlements it seeks to protect, the Wall is manifestly intended to create facts on the ground."

The report further observes that "check-

points, closures and curfews are words that fail to capture the full enormity of what is happening today in the West Bank and Gaza."

**Economic suffering:** If one refers to the World Bank report of May 2003 then one can see the Palestinian economy has suffered as a direct consequence of curfew and closure. An estimated two million Palestinians live in poverty, dependent on aid agencies, with 60 percent living on less than \$2 per day and 22 percent of children under five suffer from acute or chronic malnutrition. Unemployment stands at 40 percent, but is as high as 60 percent in some areas. The Special Rapporteur believes that there is "a humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza. It is not the result of a natural disaster. Instead, it is a crisis imposed by a powerful state on its neighbour."

**Loss of life:** The report points out that "international humanitarian law seeks to limit harm to civilians by requiring that all parties to a conflict respect the principles of distinction and proportionality." It is therefore necessary to distinguish between civilians and combatants during conflict, and to avoid attacking a military target "which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, or

damage to civilian objects... which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated."

Between October 2000 and April 2003, the IDF has killed 230 Palestinians, and injured a further 300 in "assassination actions." Israel justifies this as self-defence and points to the inability to arrest the suspects. The report notes that the "failure to attempt such arrests inevitably gives rise to suspicions that Israel lacks evidence to place such persons on trial and therefore prefers to dispose of them arbitrarily."

**Treatment of detainees:** The Israeli High Court of Justice ruled in 1999 that various methods employed by the General Security Services against detainees were illegal when applied cumulatively. These include "violent shaking, covering the head with a sack, tying to a small tilted chair or position abase (shabeh), sleep deprivation and painful shackling." Considerable evidence exists that these methods are still employed, though the Special Rapporteur is denied access to Israeli prisons.

**House demolitions:** The UN estimates that by May 2003 Israel had demolished 1,134 Palestinian homes in the Gaza strip alone rendering around 10,000 people homeless. The rate of demolition has increased from around 32 per month between 2000 and 2002, to 75 per month in 2003. Jeff Halper of the Committee Against House Demolitions believes, "The bulldozer has become as much of a symbol of Israeli occupation as the rifle and the tank."

**Israeli settlers:** The last section of the report looks at Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. It notes that they are a violation of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying power from transferring parts of its own civilian population into territory it occupies. There are currently around 200 settlements with a population of around 417,000 settlers. Some of these are full blown towns and villages, and roads constructed to link them together have also resulted in the taking of Palestinian land.

A recent study by B'Tselem estimates that as much as 41.9 percent of the total land area of the West Bank is effectively under settler control. Population growth in the settlements is three times that of Israel itself.

**Conclusion:** The report concludes that "evidence strongly suggests that Israel is determined to create facts on the ground amounting to de facto annexation," and that "the time has come to condemn the Wall as an unlawful act of annexation in the same way that Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights has been condemned as unlawful."

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Billy I Ahmed is a researcher.