



Reconstruction Taskforce Meets in Iraq
April 15, 2003

The U.S. begins process of rebuilding an Iraqi government by convening first meeting of Iraqis in a post Saddam regime.

The U.S. and Britain met with nearly 100 Iraqi groups Tuesday to discuss the formation of a new government in Iraq.

The meeting, led by former U.S. General Jay Garner, was held near Nasiriya in the ancient southern city of Ur.

At the end of the meeting, U.S. Central Command released a 13-point statement outlining key goals for rebuilding an Iraqi government. The first item on the list: "Iraq must be democratic."

Other points from the statement include that Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath political party must be dissolved and that Iraqis must choose their leaders and not have them imposed from the outside.

Shiites oppose the meeting

Attending the meeting were leaders of the Iraqi National Congress, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

Members of the main Shiite group, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI), boycotted the meeting, citing U.S. involvement. "We cannot be part of a process which is under an American general," said the group's spokesman.

Thousands of Iraqis protested in the streets, shouting "No to America, No to Saddam."

Garner emphasizes Iraqi-led reform

Garner opened the meeting by emphasizing that the U.S. wants to jumpstart a reformed Iraqi government rather than to institute a U.S.-controlled democracy. He urged Iraqis to establish their own democratic system based on "Iraqi traditions, Iraqi values."

White House envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said, "I can assure you that, on behalf of the United States,...we have no interest, absolutely no interest in ruling Iraq,"

Can democracy flourish in Iraq?

However, some critics of the U.S. plan say instituting democracy in the mostly Arab country will not work.

Murhaf Jouejati, an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington, told the San Francisco Chronicle that though Iraqis desire peace rather than oppression, the country lacks conditions conducive to democracy.

"There has not been a single day of democracy in Iraq in its history," he said. "It is still a tribal and clan-oriented society. Democracy needs a social infrastructure that does not exist at all in Iraq, or elsewhere in the region."

Iraq is made up of many divided religious and ethnic groups and has experienced decades of war and economic sanctions. Prior to Saddam Hussein's 30-year dictatorship, Iraq was a monarchy and had a military dictatorship. The country has never had free elections or a free press.

Establishing the transition process

Garner's reconstruction taskforce will oversee the gradual transition of power to Iraqi officials, a process that could take three to six months, he said.

But, the installation of a new government could take longer, according to one member of Garner's taskforce.

"One has to go through the process of building from the bottom up, allowing the leadership to establish itself, and then the election process to go through and so forth. That full electoral process may well take longer," British Maj. Gen. Tim Cross told the Associated Press Monday.

The meeting ended with an agreement to reconvene in 10 days.

-- By Kristina Nwazota, NewsHour Extra

Vocabulary

U.S. Central Command - (n.) Headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) is one of nine Unified Combatant Commands assigned operational control of U.S. combat forces. A Unified Combatant Command is composed of forces from two or more services, has a broad and continuing mission, and is normally organized on a geographical basis into regions known as "Areas Of Responsibility" (AORs). USCENTCOM's AOR stretches from the Horn of Africa to Central Asia. (www.centcom.mil)

Iraqi National Congress [INC] - The INC was formed when the two main Kurdish separatist militias — the Kurdistan Democratic Party [KDP] headed by Masud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK] headed by Jalal Talabani — participated in a June 1992 meeting in Vienna of nearly 200 delegates from dozens of opposition groups.

The group is an ethnic and religious mix of Sunnis, Shias, Kurds and Christians and maintains its headquarters in Salahuddin with an external base in London.

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan [PUK]- *The PUK was created in 1975 after a failed Kurdish rebellion in Iraq. Jalal Talabani, a KDP leader, broke away to form a party that would "provide a new direction for Kurdish resistance and society."*

Kurdistan Democratic Party [KDP]- *The KDP, the larger of the two Kurdish groups, was established in 1946 under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani.*

The Kurds are a largely Sunni Muslim, non-Arabic tribe living in a mountainous area of Southeast Asia often referred to as Kurdistan ("Land of the Kurds") for more than 2,000 years. Though Kurdistan is a commonly used term and the Kurds have tried to set up independent states in Iran, Iraq and Turkey for more than 80 years, the approximately 25 Kurds don't have their own state, making them the largest ethnic group in the world without an official homeland.