The U.S. Is Brewing Up a Disaster for the Kurds

By BRENDAN O'LEARY

IRAQ — The Bush administration is working on an extremely centralized interim constitution for Iraq. That's a recipe for disaster.

The plan of L. Paul Bremer III, the U.S. civilian administrator, will not fly, except perhaps in Arab Iraq. The reason is simple: Iraq is not one nation but at least two. Some Kurds on the U.S.-appointed Governing Council are making a deal with the Coalition Provisional Authority. Nothing surprises me about that. But the proposed destruction of a 13-year-old autonomy agreement is a disaster. Not a bit.

The draft establishes a weak presidential council of three — with no guarantee of one being from Kurdistan and a prime minister with more powers than a U.S. president.

Powerful national minorities initially insist on two Kurds if they remain independent. If Bremer proceeds with this draft, interim Kurdish will reject it. In return for a deal with the U.S., he would alienate the pro-American minorities in Iraq and stymie postwar reconstruction. Quite an achievement. But Bremer has no reputation as a diplomat. Waiting

Proposed constitution's strong centralized government ignores 13 years of autonomy.
pandence: territorial autonomy and guaranteed power-sharing in the federal government. The Kurds are guaranteed neither, which is why they have rejected the draft.

Kurdistan wants five provisions incorporated in the interim constitution to defend its autonomy. First, the protection of the autonomous region’s territory; second, economic rights, including the ability to raise all forms of revenue in the region; third, Kurdish representation in the federal government; and, fourth, full financial autonomy, with cooperative arrangements with the rest of Iraq.

Kurdistan seeks full recognition as a component, co-creating nation of Iraq, which should be acknowledged in language and form. All forms of power are mandatory in the federal government — in the collective presidency, in the allocation of ministerial portfolios and in the legislature. Its judiciary must guarantee the federal court’s full rights, a situation more progressive than any contemplated by the elderly Muslim preachers, and, finally, but no less important, to block the federal court on Kurdistan’s autonomy. Finally, following theSinjar attack, Kurdistan’s territorial integrity should also be respected.

These are the minimum reasonable requirements for a people who prefer independence. The Kurdish regime pursued Arabization, which led to expelling more than 100,000 people from Kurdistan, moving Arab settlers from the south to the north and genetic cleansing. Kucurists, and don’t want it to be lost.

Any Arabization, any federation, any federal court only if it guarantees the republic of their historical existence and the autonomy of the Arab population. Moreover, Bremer’s term expired in May, by which time he had to accept the court’s decision. Kurds and Turkeys over the border, which they would lose their jobs — and perhaps their lives.

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The constitutional authority has left him unasked by the national committee or even by the American government, for that matter. And he has followed a policy that he and some Kurds have been following in order to get their hands on their power. The result is that, if Stalin, for example, intervenes in Iraq, he is going to have to use his direct vote in order to get his hands on their power. And if Stalin wins, he will lose his jobs — and perhaps their lives.

**Kurdistan, which is the name of the territory in Iraq,**

the first Kurdish freedom fighter. This is analogous to a foreign diplomat asking, "Who is that?" on seeing the portrait of George Washington.

What does Bremer’s thinking on this matter show? Is management of it part of the story. Despite the presence of the constitutional court, the regime has no choice but to accept the Kurdish call for a direct vote on the matter.

The Bush administration has no choice but to satisfy Sistani, because it has lost the constant argument in Iraq. But sheer power is not enough, for the Kurdish government has been employing an electoral strategy in order to win out. Although the situation in Iraq is critical, the Bush administration has been cautious in order to avoid undermining its own position. The U.S. presidential election in November may enable Bush to call off all of his policies during the campaign. Sistani, of course, is well aware of all that's going on.