

December 1, 2006

## Having Pinned Little Hope on Talks, Many Iraqis Appear to Be Beyond Disappointment

By [KIRK SEMPLE](#)

BAGHDAD, Nov. 30 — Even if Sana al-Nabhani had cared about the summit meeting in Jordan on Thursday between Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) and President Bush, she would not have been able to watch the news. As usual, Iraqis went without electricity from the national grid for most of the day and she could not find any gasoline to run her personal generator.

Told by a reporter later in the day about the meeting's outcome, Ms. Nabhani, a 34-year-old homemaker, scoffed: "Is that all? Was that even worth the fuel consumed by their airplanes?"

Her dismay was common among Iraqis who managed to follow the news on Thursday. So was a range of other emotions that probably would not hearten Mr. Maliki or Mr. Bush, including disappointment, indifference and despair.

For many, the talks promised little and delivered less and reaffirmed a widespread loss of faith in the elected government's ability to turn things around.

At a news conference after the meeting, Mr. Bush said he had agreed to speed up the transfer of authority over the security forces to the Iraqi government, as Mr. Maliki has wanted, though the two leaders did not spell out a timetable. Mr. Maliki reassured Mr. Bush that his government was committed to cracking down on outlaws and stabilizing the country.

These assurances amounted to nothing more than hollow promises in the opinion of Ahmed Khalaf, a 34-year-old Shiite who works as a taxi driver in Baghdad.

"It's useless!" he roared as he inched through the traffic-clogged streets of central Baghdad after dusk. "It's wasting time!"

Mr. Khalaf had one hand on the wheel; the other he alternately jerked around in the air for emphasis and pressed against his temple in a vain attempt to soothe a raging headache.

"Nothing will happen, and we will get no results and no solutions," he went on. "We need a strong state that can make decisions, that can beat the bad guys, can beat the militias. This meeting is just for the media, and it's not useful!"

The summit meeting in Jordan took place against a backdrop of disarray here. War-related deaths among Iraqi civilians have soared on the increasing momentum of revenge between Shiites and Sunnis. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been driven from their homes. Public services remain feeble, with millions of Iraqis

going into the chill of a fourth desert winter with only a few hours of electricity a day. And the political process has almost completely ground to a halt.

In a news conference here following his return from Amman, Mr. Maliki called for an end to the parliamentary boycott by 30 legislators and six cabinet members loyal to [Moktada al-Sadr](#), the anti-American Shiite cleric. Mr. Maliki had ignored their request to cancel the meeting with Mr. Bush.

“I wish they would reconsider their decision because it doesn’t represent a positive development in our political process,” he said. The prime minister urged the lawmakers to express their differences from within the framework of the Parliament.

The members of Mr. Sadr’s bloc said they would end their boycott on condition that Mr. Bush cede more authority over Iraqi security forces to Mr. Maliki, and that the government improve public services.

Falah Hassan Shenshel, a member of the Sadr bloc, said Thursday that the Sadr loyalists were reaching across ethnic and religious lines to organize an alliance against the American military presence in [Iraq](#). The group, he said, would demand a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops. “It’s a patriotic national group, it’s not sectarian or ethnic,” he said. “We need to be freed from the occupation.”

Mr. Sadr led his formidable Mahdi Army in two major uprisings against American forces in 2004 and, since then, has risen to become arguably the country’s most powerful politician. By lending his support to Mr. Maliki in the race for prime minister earlier this year, Mr. Sadr earned political capital that has complicated the prime minister’s efforts to disband the country’s militias.

The American military said Iraqi security forces found 28 bodies on Wednesday in a mass grave outside Baquba, the capital of Diyala Province. In Basra, gunmen killed Naser Kedami, a deputy in the Sunni Endowment, which oversees the country’s Sunni mosques, the police said.

Two American soldiers were killed during combat operations in the capital, one on Wednesday and one on Thursday, the American military command said.

Iraqis have grown frustrated with the government’s inability to solve the country’s worsening crises, and any good faith and optimism that greeted Mr. Maliki when he took office six months ago is quickly drying up.

“The solutions are so obvious that Maliki does not need Bush to tell him about them,” said Huda, a 40-year-old graphic designer in Baghdad, who would give only her first name out of concern for her safety.

“Mr. Maliki had many chances before to show his ability, but he failed,” she said. “We need a strong man and he is not like this at all.”

Mohammad Ridha, a 43-year-old Shiite who is an agricultural engineer in Najaf, said that he had followed the meeting in Amman, Jordan, and that it “didn’t make me feel any less depressed.”

But he left open the possibility, however slight, that the summit meeting might somehow lead to positive changes. “If I feel a real improvement in the street,” he said, dipping into his dwindling reserves of hope, “then I’ll say that the meeting was fruitful.”

*Khalid W. Hassan, Abdul Razzaq al-Saiedi and an Iraqi employee of The New York Times contributed reporting.*

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