Editorial: Iraq election ignites religious divisions

Last Sunday, Iraqi citizens had the opportunity to participate in a democratic election for the first time in over 50 years. In the months leading up to this milestone in the liberation of Iraq, many wondered how insurgents would react to an event of this magnitude. Their questions were answered, in the days leading up to the election, when terrorists made clear their intent to "wash the streets of Baghdad with voters’ blood." Thankfully, attacks were kept to a minimum due to the U.S. military’s pre-election lock-downs. However, the election itself served to illuminate a massive divide between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, one that could come to undo any progress the United States may make in its effort to bring freedom to the Middle East.

The Association of Muslim Scholars, the highest Sunni authority in Iraq, has already challenged the legitimacy of the elections. This is due to the fact that many Sunnis did not vote as a result of a boycott, resulting in little or no representation for a group that makes up about 20 percent of the Iraqi population. In addition, the leading Sunni candidate for inclusion in the 275-member National Assembly was left off the ballot entirely. While the former problem is the fault of the Sunni Muslims themselves, the latter brings a serious flaw in these elections to light. Rather than bridging the gap between Sunnis and Sunnis through equal representation, the elections will serve only to transfer power to the majority Shiites, who were oppressed under Saddam Hussein’s regime. While these individuals certainly deserve revenge for the way they were treated in the past, the goal of any election is to unite a country through a peaceful and fair transfer of power. The elections as they stand now will only serve to intensify the hatred between these two groups and lead to further terrorist attacks throughout the region.

As tensions increase, the U.S. military will have no choice but to remain in the country until Iraq can build up its own army, a task which is still far from completion. Iraq’s interim Defense Minister Hazem Sha’alan has already said that it would be a mistake for the U.S. to leave at this point and that Sunni Muslims upset about what could turn out to be gross under-representation in Iraq’s new government may find themselves joining ranks with terrorist groups. This will only lead to more and deadlier attacks on both Iraqi civilians and the U.S. military.

Still, credit must be given where it is due. U.S. military forces did an excellent job protecting voters from terrorist attacks. While the former problem is the fault of the Sunni Muslims themselves, the latter brings a serious flaw in these elections to light. Rather than bridging the gap between Sunnis and Sunnis through equal representation, the elections will serve only to transfer power to the majority Shiites, who were oppressed under Saddam Hussein’s regime. While these individuals certainly deserve revenge for the way they were treated in the past, the goal of any election is to unite a country through a peaceful and fair transfer of power. The elections as they stand now will only serve to intensify the hatred between these two groups and lead to further terrorist attacks throughout the region.

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Still, credit must be given where it is due. U.S. military forces did an excellent job protecting voters from terrorist attacks. While some violence did erupt, it was not enough to deter Iraqi citizens from making their voices heard. However, those voices included only a small percentage of Sunnis and a vast majority of Shiites. If Iraq’s National Assembly turns out to be similarly disproportional, then the Iraqi elections may not be remembered as a victory for democracy, but as the spark that finally set the big explosion off. This weekly editorial expresses the majority opinion of The Rider News editorial board and is written by the Opinion Editor.

Letter to the Editor: Longing for Rider at Aquinas College

Ever since I left Rider University for personal and financial reasons, I have grown to miss it. Now before you all jump to the next story or go to the sports section, I think you should hear me out and then pin-point your own opinions on this. After all, this might help you appreciate your thousands of dollars in loans that either you or your parents will have to face in the future.

I knew I wanted to study Journalism, concentrate on my voice and study abroad in Italy during my junior year. I felt that Rider was the perfect choice since it was close to home and had very promising results for all the graduates that worked hard in the school.

The first year, like everyone else, I found my clique and joined clubs. My roommate Lynn and I joined the newspaper, looked at different sororities and had a good time roaming the halls of Hill. I went to the gym religiously, joined the choir and even went to the chapel at night with other avid singers to practice for our concerts and masses.

I joined the chorus of complaints about the cafeteria food, but in reality, my friends and I secretly enjoyed stuffing our faces with the cooks’ specials and the lavish salad bar with dozens of toppings freshly made each day. Every morning when leaving my residence hall, I’d wave “hola” to the cleaning ladies who never failed to have a smile on their face.

I also thought my classes were fantastic. I never got up at the crack of dawn smiling gaily because I had a test that day, but I knew my money was not being down the drain. There were plenty of wonderful professors who took the time and energy to give an almost amazing performance in class. Some of these classes were dreaded because they were requirements, but some became less of a burden and more pleasurable. I loved that we had tutors available and a writing center. All in all, Rider was very good to me.

I left for personal and financial reasons and ended up in the middle of the United States… Grand Rapids, Mich. Here, they say “pop” instead of soda and overuse the diphthong when pronouncing certain words. We hang out at this place called Yesterdog, which if you’ve seen the movie American Pie, you would be familiar with See ‘Aquinas,’ page 9