

UN aid coordinators in Iraq resign in protest against embargo

by Hussein Al-Nadeem

The recent, simultaneous resignations of the two top UN workers in Iraq, Hans von Sponeck, the chief coordinator for humanitarian affairs in Iraq, and Jutta Burghardt, head of the World Food Program in Iraq, have emphasized two interrelated aspects of the tragedy in Iraq: first, the failure of the immoral and genocidal policy of the “New World Order” initiated by George Bush and Margaret Thatcher, and the desperate attempt by the Anglo-American establishment to keep this crisis alive as one of the most important aspects of this new order. Second, these developments come at a time when the military-strategic situation indicates that there is a move toward a military escalation in the Middle East in general, and Iraq in particular.

The two resignations were followed by the widely publicized appeal by 70 U.S. Congressmen to President Bill Clinton on Feb. 16, calling on him to lift the sanctions imposed on Iraq since 1990. This coincided with the moving of a major Russian reconnaissance ship from the Black Sea to the eastern Mediterranean, reportedly to monitor the movement of 400 U.S.-British naval vessels active in the Gulf in anticipation of a major military operation against Iraq, according to official Russian sources.

Von Sponeck and Burghardt, both German career diplomats at the United Nations, resigned in mid-February in protest against the UN “humanitarian aid” program in Iraq, and against the pressure practiced by the U.S. and Britain in the UN Sanctions Committee to block appropriate function of this program. Under the UN scheme called “oil for food,” Iraq is allowed to sell limited amounts of oil in order to finance food, medicine, and other basic civilian supplies. In reality, less than one-third of the revenues have been used to buy food and medicine for the Iraqi population. More than one-third has gone for war reparations to Kuwait and other countries, and for UN operations in Iraq. The remaining sum has been frozen in Western banks, because the U.S. and Britain have blocked hundreds of contracts for spare parts for Iraq’s oil industry, energy, and water treatment facilities.

“We have increasing evidence on many fronts. When you look at the mortality situation you could see there is a rising trend,” von Sponeck told Qatar’s al-Jazeera satellite television. “In 1991, fifty-six children under the age of five per 1,000 were dying. Now 10 years later, the figure has gone up, according to Unicef, to 131 per 1,000,” he said. “Malnutrition.

I keep saying every night, one out of five Iraqi children under five goes to be malnourished,” he said. So, there is a sense of hopelessness, and can we afford, can anyone afford, to associate himself or herself with such a reality? I cannot.”

On the conditions in education, von Sponeck emphasized that “there is not enough anywhere, whether it is books or pencils or classroom furniture. . . . That is the generation that is now in Iraq being prepared for responsible citizenship of tomorrow,” he said.

“Every year that passes, every month, in fact, that passes, sees the intensity of the weight of the sanctions on the lives of people here increase,” he said. According to a Unicef report released last year, mortality rates among Iraqi children more than doubled in the past ten years.

Jutta Burghardt submitted her resignation over the weekend of Feb. 13, saying that a UN resolution offering to ease the ten-year-old sanctions on Iraq was unworkable. She said that she supported von Sponeck’s statements. Von Sponeck’s predecessor, Denis Halliday of Ireland, left his post in mid-1998 after voicing similar views. He not only resigned, but also started campaigning in the United States and Europe to lift the sanctions.

Growing opposition

Added to the U.S. Congressmen’s appeal to lift the sanctions, these developments are threatening to discredit the U.S.-British policy, and, even more, the Presidential campaigns of the so-called front-runners such as Al Gore and George W. Bush, who have pledged to take even harsher measures against Iraq, including military action to overthrow the Baghdad government.

“This embargo hasn’t hurt Saddam Hussein or the pampered elite that supports him but has been devastating for millions of Iraqi people,” Rep. David Bonior (D-Mich.) told a Feb. 16 news conference. “Our message is simple. We’re saying millions of children are suffering and we refuse to close our eyes to the slaughter of innocents,” he added. Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), said: “What we have done is to put in place a policy that is not only counter-productive—it’s more than that, it’s immoral.”

This policy has faced ever-growing opposition from Russia, China, and most continental European states, including France, Italy, and Spain, in addition to most nations in the

Third World. There is a perceived danger that the British-American-Commonwealth warmongers will move the field of operation from the Caucasus, especially after the Chechnya operation failed in destabilizing Russia at a greater scale, to the Middle East. The Gulf, specifically Iraq, has become an easily manipulated field for this new cold war against Russia and China.

Following the British-American December 1998 "Desert Fox" military operation against Iraq, which ended the cooperation between the UN weapons inspectors and Iraq, the British government came with a new proposal to return the weapon inspectors to Iraq through a new Security Council resolution. As expected, this British proposal was supported by the U.S. After protests, negotiations, and compromises, Russia, France, and China accepted a modified form of the proposal demanding that Iraq cooperate with a new team of inspectors called UNMOVIC under Resolution 1284, in return for "suspending" the oil embargo for periods of six months. This resolution continues to place oil revenues under U.S.-British control. Iraq has rejected this resolution. American and British officials have threatened to use force to implement the UN resolution.

Unrepentant war-mongers

In the United States, the State Department, under Madeleine Albright, and Vice President Al Gore have decided to

ignore all these developments and pursue the same catastrophic policy. These two played a key role in promoting the December 1998 bombing of Iraq.

Albright on Feb. 16 defended Washington's policy toward Iraq, rejecting Congressional criticism, saying that it was in "disarray," and stressing that the administration remained focussed on removing Saddam Hussein from power. "Our policy toward Iraq has not changed," Albright told the House International Relations Committee. "We are committed to regime change and in assisting the opposition both inside and outside Iraq," she said. "We've been working very hard with the opposition and are discussing providing it first with non-lethal material and training." U.S. military experts have repeatedly emphasized that the Iraqi opposition will never be able to achieve these goals without a major American military intervention on the ground. Such an involvement has been opposed by the Clinton administration.

Meanwhile, Al Gore, who is desperate to carry out whatever crazy adventure to secure a victory in the coming elections, has invited the Iraqi opposition for a meeting in Washington, for "concrete planning" to overthrow the Iraqi regime. In a letter to the Iraqi opposition on Feb. 8, Gore said: "I would welcome a meeting with the leadership of the Iraqi National Congress to hear more about what can and must be done to accomplish our shared objective in promoting freedom and democracy in Iraq."

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