

From Nation-State To Cargo Cult!

by Hussein Askary

April 3—The intention behind the invasion of Iraq in 2003 had already been declared by British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1999, as the ending of the epoch of the universal principle of national sovereignty, inaugurated by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.¹

However, that British imperial doctrine fell on its face, temporarily, at the Copenhagen Climate Conference, in December 2009, when China, India, and a group of African nations stood their ground in defense of the very principle of national sovereignty and independence the Iraq War was launched to make obsolete.

As Blair admitted in the recent “Chilcot Inquiry,” Iraq was never a threat to world peace. Actually, Iraq was only a threat to international peace, when its leadership, including Saddam Hussein, acted as useful tools of international geopolitical aims, under Anglo-American direction (as was the case with the Iran-Iraq War 1980-88). Unlike what many enemies and friends of Iraq believe, Iraq was not becoming a world power. At best, Iraq was, since the nationalization of the petroleum wealth away from the grip of British companies in 1971, a good example of how a developing nation, acting as a sovereign nation-state, was using its natural resources for real economic development, especially in basic infrastructure, health care, high-technology-oriented education, and scientific research.

All that is gone and forgotten now; after three devastating wars (1980-88, 1991, and 2003), 13 years of criminal economic sanctions (1990-2003), and destruction of the country’s infrastructure and industrial capabilities by the United States and Britain, Iraq was

sent back to the pre-1971 era of poverty, illiteracy, and religious fundamentalism. The recent emergence of bloody sectarian violence, instigated by foreign forces, although subsiding now, has left deep scars on the psychological character and social texture of society. At any given moment, an incident, with the killing of a few or many members of a specific group, can trigger a chain-reaction of revenge/counter-revenge reactions by either Sunni or Shi’a groups or individuals.

Instigating Sectarian Strife

The Iraqis this author met, during a recent visit to a neighboring country, strongly suspect that, in many cases, the initial attack is instigated by a third force, an outside force, supported by one or many of the foreign intelligence services or mercenary groups (foreign private-security firms) active in Iraq, such as the British, American, Saudi, or Iranian services. Or, these are carried out by Iraqi groups run by these intelligence agencies such as the Badr brigades (Shi’a), al-Mahdi army (Shi’a), or the Salafi group (Sunni) supported by international Saudi Wahhabi networks.

In one known case, two British Special Air Service officers were arrested by Iraqi police in 2005 in Basrah, when they refused to stop at a checkpoint; they were dressed in Arab garb and wearing beards; the car they were driving was loaded with weapons, explosives, and detonators. British forces, in a desperate move, smashed the police station with bulldozers and tanks the same day, to secure the release of the two officers. No serious investigation was ever carried out to determine what those two SAS officers were doing.

The Iraqi government, at the time, under Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, deprived of sovereignty, power, and dignity, did not even protest the incident! Iraqi policemen involved in the arrest managed at least to bring international reporters to the police station before the British raid, to take photos of the two Brits and their equipment. Counterinsurgency, or gang-counter-gang methods, where phony terror groups are created to divide and conquer subject societies, or to destroy legitimate resistance groups, is a well-known tactic to British imperialists, used in Malaysia, Kenya (the Mau-Mau operation), and in Northern Ireland. It is not unlikely that the private security firms in Iraq such as British Aegis and American Blackwater are copying these methods.

1. See Jeffrey Steinberg and Mary Burdman, “London’s Blair Pushes Post-Westphalia Chaos,” *EIR*, Jan. 18, 2008.

It is almost impossible to find out the identity of who commits massacres against the members of one sect or the other, because there are so many actors in the country, and the attacks are usually carried out by persons dressed either as U.S. or Iraqi soldiers or police, attacking in the darkness of night. This happened again, as this report was being written: A massacre was committed on April 2, in a village south of Baghdad where 25 Sunni civilians (including women and children) were handcuffed and shot by men dressed as soldiers.

The images of torture and satanic killing of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. prison guards in Abu Ghraib, and British soldiers abusing Iraqi children in Basrah, contributed greatly to the rage and bloodthirst among certain sections of Iraqi society, especially uneducated and hopeless youth with criminal inclinations. Although this was a tiny section of society, enormous damage was inflicted in the sectarian rampage.

Although the Iraqi people, in recent history, have exhibited an amazing ability to survive apocalyptic upheavals, and a spirit of determination to revive their national identity and begin rebuilding from the rubble, this time it is different: Without an external change in world affairs, there can be no recovery from the current crisis. Iraq itself, and Southwest Asia as whole, which has been placed on the edge of a volcano by the insane British-Saudi-American and even Iranian strategic games, such as the Shi'a-Sunni sectarian conflict, can descend into the abyss at any moment, from miscalculation or foolish moves by any of the parties involved.²

The Destruction of Iraq's Economy

The former government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, 2006-10 (a government without sovereignty), which was an artificial alliance of mostly Shi'a-Arab parties with the Kurds and some Sunni-Arab parties, was held hostage initially to the exploding Shi'a-Sunni sectarian violence and an insurgency. It also had to survive the political and military control of the U.S.-British occupation under Bush/Cheney and Tony Blair.

Al-Maliki's government sought to compensate the Iraqi people for all the suffering, not by giving them a

future, but by drowning them with petrodollars and cheaply imported goods, mainly from China. Iraq's oil production, which rose to 2.5 million barrels per day in that interval, is the single source of income for the country, due to the destruction of its domestic manufacturing and agriculture, by the cheap imports that the government and its foreign controllers encouraged.

Two members of this author's family illustrate this point clearly. One was a textile producer, but seeing the impossibility of running a factory (since the U.S.-British invading force destroyed the electric power production and distribution grid, and most of the production capabilities feeding his industry), he discovered early the advantages of importing cheap finished clothing from China. The other, also a manager of a textile factory, fought to keep his 30-year-long business producing clothing for a reasonable profit, and employing more than 20 workers, thus, sustaining many families.

The latter relative is now bankrupt and his factory shut down, while the former has made a fortune.

The same applies to agriculture. With the destruction of the water/power infrastructure and absence of repair and maintenance operations, Iraqi farmers are producing poor crops, costing three or four times more than imports from Syria, Iran, and Turkey. Tariffs on imported food don't exist, nor subsidies for farmers. Previous state support, with free improved seeds and fertilizers, was withdrawn after the invasion in 2003. With several years of drought, lower levels of water in the rivers, and dysfunctional pumping systems, the available water became unsuitable even for animals, and actually dangerous for humans. Life for farmers in the rural areas has become a hell, with most of them being forced to move to urban areas with less horrendous living conditions.

The state of the basic infrastructure (transport, water, and electric power generation and distribution) remains disastrous, following the U.S. "Shock and Awe" bombing wave in 2003. Although minor repairs have been made, the system itself is not capable of supporting the 30 million Iraqis who have been moving into population concentrations in the capital and major cities. The health-care system continues to falter, because the infrastructure of the hospitals themselves, including the staff, is faltering. A great number of physicians and qualified health-care workers fled the country between 2005 and 2008, to escape from ethnic

2. See Hussein Askary, "A New 'Nawrooz' for the World? British Iran Sanctions Ploy Could Send Region into Chaos," *EIR*, April 2, 2010.



Wikimedia Commons

The state of basic infrastructure (transport, water, and electric power generation and distribution) in Iraq remains disastrous, following the U.S. “Shock and Awe” bombing wave in 2003. Shown: Coalition Forces respond to a car bombing in South Baghdad, as a second bomb explodes, during “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” in 2005.

and sectarian killings.

The education system is in a similar condition. The phenomenon of students dropping out of school to work to support their families started during the 1990-2003 sanctions years, and continues to this day. According to UNESCO surveys conducted in 2009, an average of 250,000 children drop out of school every year. UNESCO also estimates that about 6 million of the country’s 30 million people are illiterate; this, in a country that was about to eliminate illiteracy in the 1980s. About 350,000 Iraqi children living in refugee camp conditions in neighboring countries, are not getting any real education.

Iraqi Oil Auctioned

In spite of that, al-Maliki’s government, with many, if not all, of its policies, seems to be moving fast to strengthen the “consumer society” structure of Iraq. It has auctioned off Iraq’s oil wealth to increase oil production to 8-10 million bpd from the current 2.5 million bpd. Since oil is the only source of national income, paying for increasing imports of goods that Iraqi society needs will demand greater amounts of cash. No credit for long-term national development plans is in

sight. Many unwitting Iraqis think that Iraq will be as prosperous as the other Arab Gulf states, which enjoy high levels of consumption by relying on oil and gas exports.

In January, the first major auction/bidding process for production of Iraqi oil by international oil companies was concluded. Anglo-Dutch Royal Shell received the lion’s share for developing production of the massive Majnoun oil field in Basrah in southern Iraq, one of the largest oil fields in the world. Majnoun currently produces 46,000 bpd, but, with its estimated reserves of 20-30 billion barrels, production can increase to 1.8 million bpd within six years, according to the contract with Shell.

The second- and third-largest contracts for development of the large Rumaila oil field in southern Iraq went to a consortium of British Petroleum (BP) and China’s National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). Another, for development of al-Halfaya oil field, was awarded to CNPC. Other less impressive oil field development contracts for western and northern Iraq were awarded to companies in the U.S., Italy, and South Korea, countries that participated in the invasion in 2003.

Iraq has the second-largest oil reserve in the world, following Saudi Arabia, with an estimated 140-170 billion barrels. Although the government claims that the contract offers only \$1.39 to \$2 per barrel produced to the foreign companies, the fact is that the sovereign wealth of Iraq and its future have now moved from the control of an Iraqi state-owned company into the hands of the British and whoever is allied with them. China keeps a special place in the equation, but still, this is not an agreement between two sovereign governments. This is a deal between a government under siege and the London-based imperial world power.

That will need more study, but the underlying problem here is that the government is desperately focusing on the increase of oil production for cash, to help it flood the Iraqi people with cheap consumer goods to keep them quiet.

The Arithmetic of the Iraqi Elections

The situation in Iraq is highly insecure due to the uncertainty of the outcome of the elections held March 8, and the prospects for forming a viable government soon. The election results gave the al-Iraqia List, an alliance of different sectarian and secular groups under former Prime Minister Ibrahim Allawi, 91 seats; the Dawlat al-Qanun (State of Law), also an alliance of different Shi'a-Sunni groups, but of Shi'a dominance under Prime Minister al-Maliki, 89 seats; the Iraqi National Alliance (of Shi'a Islamist groups and clerics of Ammar al-Hakim and Muqtada Assadr), 71 seats; and the Kurdish alliance of President Jala Talabani and Masoud Barzani, 42 seats. None of these parties are capable of leading a government or formation of a government, according to the Iraqi Federal Court. A bloc of different parties needs at least 163 parliamentary seats, of the total 325, to form a government, but then needs the support of 217 members of Parliament to pass through the appointments of the Prime Minister, the President, and the Speaker of Parliament.

Therefore, a lot of horse trading is going on among the different blocs. The most likely outcome is that the current prime minister, al-Maliki, remains in power with his Dawlat al-Qanoun, the Iraqi "Shi'a" alliance, and the Kurds in one bloc. The problem this will create, is that the majority of Sunnis, who have had a share in the recent government, will be left out, leading to increasing sectarian tension.

Ironically, the fate of Iraq, in a similar fashion to that of Lebanon, is not decided by internal power-sharing acrobatics, but by the strategic conflicts among world powers, and among regional powers. Therefore, Iraqi leaders in the Shi'a and Kurdish groups made a pilgrimage to Tehran to discuss the formation of a power alliance with Iranian leaders! Allawi and the Sunni groups are in discussion with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and other Arab nations.

However, ultimately, the fate of Iraq will be decided by developments in the United States around the policies of President Barack Obama, not only in Iraq, but all over Southwest Asia and the world. The fight by sovereign nations against the British Empire has been and will remain the decisive factor in world politics.

Until that larger fight is decided, Iraq will remain on the edge of a volcano of both internal and external explosions.