

Last Chance To Save Iraq From Civil War?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Is there still a chance to prevent civil war in Iraq? That is the question prompted by reports of escalating violence, which reached a new highpoint over the July 16-17 weekend, when multiple attacks by suicide bombers killed more than 110 people and wounded 300. Despite these alarming developments, it *is* still possible to avert the worst, and to chart a new course which could lead the nation back to independence and sovereignty, under which conditions, it could seek a route towards national reconciliation. Whether or not this will occur, will depend on two factors: the withdrawal of U.S., U.K., and other foreign troops, beginning now; and the establishment of a regional security arrangement, which would include Iraq's neighbors.

In his "LaRouche Doctrine" of April 2004, Lyndon LaRouche outlined these steps as necessary preconditions for stabilizing the region. LaRouche emphasized the importance of Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt, in such an arrangement, which extends, via Iran, into Armenia and Azerbaijan. Within such an arrangement, the U.S., U.K., and others could withdraw their forces in an orderly fashion. In May, LaRouche insisted that such withdrawal begin immediately.

Now, discussion of troop withdrawal has become public in the United Kingdom and in the United States; but in neither country is there any semblance of a coherent plan for doing so. The American law-makers, who have urged President Bush to set a timetable for bringing the troops home, have run up against a stone wall at the White House. In Britain, after an allegedly secret memo was leaked to the press, Defense Secretary John Reid did announce that troops could begin leaving the Iraqi theater within the next 12 months. At the same time, leaders in the occupation-backed Iraq government have hinted that they could take over security in certain calm areas, but they reiterated that any hasty withdrawal would plunge the country into chaos. In short: No responsible exit strategy has been worked out.

The Specter of Civil War

Increasingly, the anti-occupation resistance has shifted its focus to targetting those Iraqis considered collaborators of the foreign presence, be they police, or army recruits, or employees of the occupiers. The lion's share of victims has been counted among the Shi'ites: it is their neighborhoods, their political leaders, and their mosques being hit.

Shi'ite cleric, and member of Parliament Sheikh al-Jalal al-Din al-Seghir raised the danger of civil war openly in remarks to Parliament on July 18, saying: "What is happening, and what will happen is clear: a war against Shi'a." And a colleague, MP Khudair al-Khuzai, announced that he had 50 MPs backing his call for the formation of militias. "The government has failed to stop the terrorists," he stated. "We need to bring back popular committees," that is, militias. Were such a proposal to be implemented, it would constitute a further step towards civil strife.

Just how acutely aware leading Iraqis are, of the danger of civil war, was manifested in remarks by Moqtadar al-Sadr, a radical Shi'ite with a militia of his own. Speaking to BBC, in his first interview to a Western press agency, he called on Iraqis not to be provoked by the occupation. Acknowledging all forms of resistance to be legitimate, he added: "So I call upon other parties like the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police to exercise self-restraint with Iraqi people and not to be provoked [by] them or the occupying forces, as this isn't in the interest of Iraq." He went on: "I also call on the Iraqi people to exercise restraint, and not get enmeshed in the plans of the West or plans of the occupation that wants to provoke them. . . . The occupation in itself is the problem. Iraq not being independent is the problem. And the other problems stem from that—from sectarianism to civil war. The entire American presence causes this."

Such statements coming from al-Sadr, who had mounted a fierce resistance to the occupying armies in Baghdad and other cities last year, may appear surprising. Yet, as Arab sources have reported, they must be interpreted against the backdrop of a discreet negotiating process that has been going on, between elements of the Jaafari government in Baghdad, and political representatives of the armed resistance. Al-Sadr is said to have been personally involved in these talks, which aim at ending the bloodshed, and preventing civil war, in exchange for power sharing with the Sunni population. This entire process was torpedoed when U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld made public the existence of such talks. A further act of sabotage occurred on July 20, when three leading Sunni politicians, who had been involved in the drafting of a national Constitution, were shot dead in Baghdad.

Add to this picture the Kurdish dimension, and the contours of possible civil strife are sharpened. Since the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK unilaterally terminated its ceasefire in its war against Turkey, one year ago, the group, based in U.S.-occupied Iraq, has been orchestrating terror attacks inside Turkey. This prompted Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan to threaten cross-border military incursions into northern Iraq, which the Iraqi government rejected; only with the permission of the Iraqi Parliament could such incursions be allowed. Given that the Kurds represent a large group in the Parliament, and that Iraqi President Talabani is a Kurd, no such permit is likely to ensue.

The one bright spot on the otherwise gloomy horizon in

Iraq, is a certain progress in regional cooperation. As LaRouche had emphasized in his proposal for stabilizing Southwest Asia, a regional security arrangement is key. In Istanbul on July 18-19, the Interior Ministers of the states neighboring Iraq met for the second time, to discuss cooperation in the fight against terrorism, in dealing with illegal immigration, border security, and the protection of pilgrims. The limits of the meeting were shown around the issue of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MKO/MEK), the Iranian terrorist organization which still enjoys refuge in Iraq, under U.S. occupation: whereas the Iranians demanded that the group be expelled from Iraq, the Iraqis maintained their right to “protection” as “refugees,” for “humanitarian” reasons. Before the recent Iraq war, the MKO had been protected by Saddam Hussein, as a possible weapon against Tehran, and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), an anti-Saddam Iraqi Shi’ite organization and militia, had been allowed exile in Iran. Now the SCIRI is back in Iraq, integrated into the political process; yet the MKO remains an armed threat.

Parallel to the Istanbul meeting, a high-level government delegation from Iraq, led by the Prime Minister, visited Iran, and, after three days of talks with all relevant political leaders, signed a series of agreements for cooperation. These included economic and financial deals, a plan to co-produce automobiles, an agreement for an oil swap, and the building of new pipelines. The event came in the wake of the visit of Iraqi Defense Minister al-Dulaimi’s visit to Tehran, during which far-reaching military cooperation agreements were signed. Forging such economic, security, and military agreements between the two Persian Gulf giants, is crucial to Iraq’s hopes for reconstruction and stability.

The Resistance: ‘Time Is on Our Side’

No matter how positive the steps towards regional security may be, they alone will not suffice to solve the crisis. The fact remains—and Moqtadar al-Sadr was correct in underlining it—that “the occupation in itself is the problem.” Unless there is a clearly defined perspective for ending it, there will be more bloodshed and the country could degenerate into chaos.

Cooler heads have realized this. Former CIA chief John Deutsch, for example, argued in the *New York Times* on July 15, that the U.S. presence in Iraq was undermining its commitments elsewhere, and weakening the military. He stated point-blank: “I do not believe that we are making progress on any of our key objectives in Iraq,” adding that, although there may seem to be progress at the government level, “the underlying destabilizing effect of the insurgency is undiminished.” He called, therefore, for a “prompt withdrawal plan consisting of clearly defined political, military, and economic elements.” Robin Cook, former British Foreign Secretary, gave similar advice to the Blair government, in a *Guardian* article entitled, “Our troops are part of the problem.” He stated the obvious, “It is an inexorable law of foreign occupations that the greater

the repression, the stronger the resistance.”

Readings from military experts confirm that this is the case. One Continental European military expert, with experience in Iraq, compared the current situation of the Iraqi resistance, with what Mao Zedong called “Phase 3.” Mao had outlined Phase 1, as the strategic offensive of a superior aggressor and strategic defense of the victim; Phase 2, as the strategic consolidation of the aggressor and preparation, by the victim, of a counterattack; and Phase 3, as the strategic counteroffensive of the victim and strategic withdrawal of the enemy. This specialist considers that Phase 1 went from March 20, 2003 to April 30, 2003 (or April 9, when Baghdad fell). The reason there was no visible resistance in Baghdad, was that the Iraqis were preparing for Phase 2. Phase 2 went from mid-April 2003 to Dec. 13, 2003, when Saddam Hussein was officially captured. In this phase, there were spectacular operations like the attack against the UN headquarters, the assault on Shi’ite leader Ayatollah Hakim in Najaf, and against the Red Cross. By December this preparatory phase had been completed.

Since then Phase 3 has unfolded, with increasing intensity and quality of the strategic counteroffensive. In this phase, the resistance has the time factor as an advantage, because it has no time pressures, whereas the aggressor does. The resistance also has no requirement to make known its losses. Although a large number of civilians are killed, the population generally blames the aggressor (occupation), not the resistance.

Thus, there is no reason why the resistance should let up its pressure (unless there were a political settlement). As in the case of Vietnam, the war can drag on for years, until the occupiers either demonstrate a massive success, which is not likely, or withdraw in humiliation. This source considered Rumsfeld’s June 21, 2005 statements in this light, as highly relevant: Rumsfeld said it would not be the United States but the *Iraqis* who would defeat the insurgency. The statements by Iraqi Prime Minister Jaafari, to the effect that the Iraqis might be able to take over security responsibilities in some areas, is seen as part of the U.S. intention to start withdrawing.

What may be on the agenda in Washington and London, according to this source, is indeed withdrawal, though with one exception: the military bases which are being completed (up to 14) are considered permanent and will be maintained. That, however, will also not be viable.

The one solution that *will* work is simple: bring the troops home now.

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