

Cairo Meeting for Iraq Reconciliation

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The Arab League, which represents 22 Arab nations, sponsored a meeting in Cairo Nov. 20-23, which brought together 21 groups from Iraq, representing different political, ethnic, and religious-sectarian factions. Among the political leaders present (aside from the Iraqi government officials), were President Hosni Mubarak, Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shara'a, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, and Algerian Foreign Minister Dr. Mohammed Bedajoui, as a representative of President Bouteflika. Iran was also invited, and was represented by Foreign Minister Mottaki. In addition to the Arab League, which sponsored the event, there was support from the Organization of Islamic Conference, the European Union, and the United Nations.

The aim of the meeting was to lay the groundwork for a reconciliation conference, to take place in Baghdad in late February or early March.

The participants included all major forces in Iraq, from the Shi'ite and Kurdish political movements that dominate Iraq's government under occupation, to the Sunnis, who have constituted the backbone of the political and military resistance, both to the occupation government and the foreign military presence. Thus, alongside representatives from the (Shi'ite) Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), leading Kurdish politicians, and the movement of Shi'ite militia leader Moqtadar al-Sadr, there were also Sunni organizations, including from the Ba'athist camp, albeit under a different name.

According to leaks by the London-based Arabic daily *Al Hayat*, the meeting's final declaration stated: "We demand the withdrawal of foreign forces in accordance with a timetable, and the establishment of a national and immediate program for rebuilding the armed forces . . . that will allow them to guard Iraq's borders and get control of the security situation." On the violent conflict raging in the country, the communiqué stated: "Though resistance is a legitimate right for all people, terrorism does not represent resistance. Therefore, we condemn terrorism and acts of violence, killing and kidnapping, targeting Iraqi citizens and humanitarian, civil, government institutions, national resources, and houses of worship." The text also called for "an immediate end to arbitrary raids and arrests without a documented judicial order," the freeing of "innocent detainees," and an investigation of "allegations of torture of prisoners."

A Regional Initiative

It was largely on the initiative of the Egyptian and Saudi governments that the Arab League effort was launched. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak travelled to Saudi Arabia to discuss the Iraq crisis, at a time when Saudi representatives, led by Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal, were broadcasting the warning in Washington and worldwide that, unless the U.S. policy in Iraq were altered, the country would be plunged into civil war, and then partition and regional chaos. On Oct. 3, Prince Saud called for a meeting of all Iraqi factions to meet in Iraq under the auspices of the Arab League, to reach consensus on the constitution. He made the proposal in Jeddah, at a meeting of the Arab League's Arab committee on Iraq.

The Jeddah meeting resolved to send Arab League General Secretary Amr Moussa to Iraq, to prepare the reconciliation conference. That occurred soon thereafter, and plans were made for the preparatory meeting in Cairo. Significantly, in the process the Arab League initiated contacts with Iran, and in a meeting between Amr Moussa and Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki on Nov. 3, it was confirmed that Iran, a key neighbor of Iraq, would fully cooperate in the reconciliation effort. Mottaki travelled to Saudi Arabia to consolidate efforts.

LaRouche: 'A Messy Process'

In discussions on Nov. 28, *EIR* founder Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., explained that the Cairo meeting and related developments are manifestations of a larger, very messy and complicated process. It must not be romanticized, he said. The problem is that the inertia of some factors on the ground, coupled with inertia from other factors internationally, is relentlessly pushing Iraq towards a dead end. Movements which have little or nothing else in common, are nonetheless forced to look for the possibility of some way of getting out, because otherwise, nobody's going to win. Revenge killings, vendettas, are going on in Iraq, part of the drift of inertia. But, from the standpoint of large forces, like the mass-based Sunni organizations, the sooner the vendettas are stopped, the better the chances of survival. Bringing Iran into negotiations is also a positive step.

No one wants a mess there, but no one has a solution, LaRouche said. It's a touchy situation. The principal basis of these current developments, is that all intelligent people, whatever their other commitments, do want to keep an option open. They don't want to lose the option; in a lousy situation, you want the option to "trade up." So no one really wants to lose the option, even if no two agree, positively, on what it is they do want.

It's all good, all positive, but don't romanticize it, LaRouche stressed. Everything will depend, not on what happens outside the United States, but on what happens in the United States. It opens the possibility of a better option, but it won't work unless the United States picks up the option.