

# Malthusian elites fume at Iraq's construction of 'Third River' project

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

In a release issued to the press on Jan. 26, the Iraqi government categorically denied American allegations that defensive radar and missile launching pads had prompted the renewed U.S. air strikes in the northern and southern "no-fly zones" which have been imposed on the country by the United States, Britain, and France. "The Iraqi Army has neither installed radar or missile bases near the city of Mosul in the north, nor has it attacked American planes in the south."

If not military installations, what, then, did the U.S. air strikes aim to destroy? The war propaganda has been churning out stories of threatened Kurds in the north; it was allegedly for them that a "safe haven" was created complete with air exclusion zone. In the south, according to the British press in particular, it is the Marsh Arabs whom Iraq's President Saddam Hussein aims to eliminate—not through gunfire, but through what has been called a "diabolical plan": to dry out their swamps and set them up for capture. The means which were to be used to dry swamps out, was a massive irrigation project known as the "Third River."

This, indeed, is the target of U.S. policy. As *EIR* reported last summer, at the time when a showdown was under way between U.N. inspectors and the Iraqi Agriculture Ministry (responsible for the water projects), the target of American aggression, since the beginning of the war, has been Iraq's economic development. Now, two years after the war, the target continues to be Iraq's reconstruction effort.

## A new granary for Iraq

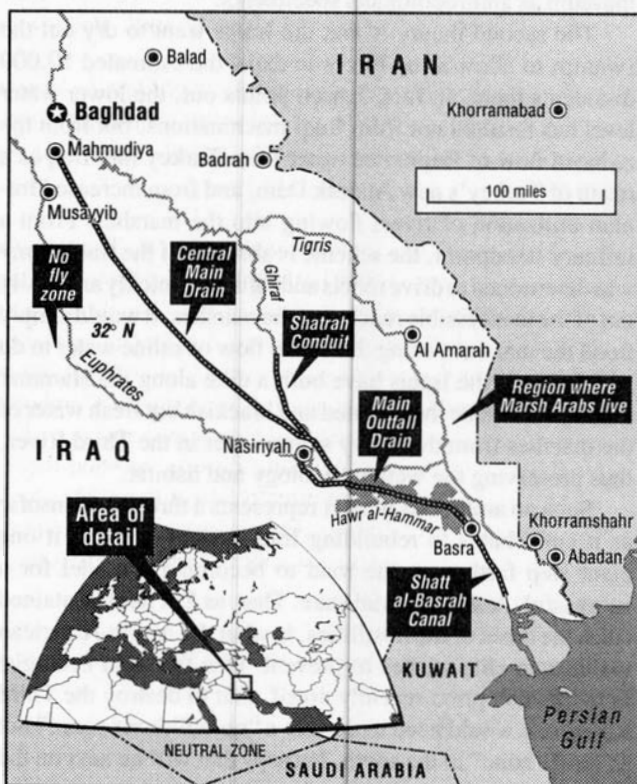
Precious little has been written in the western press about the Third River project, whose completion was celebrated on Dec. 7. A refreshing exception is an article released by Gemini News Service, by Michael Jansen, who presents concrete facts to refute the West's charges that the project was "designed to destroy the 6,000-year-old way of life of the tribal people who live in Iraq's southern marshlands."

Jansen explains that the project, first proposed by an American 40 years ago, aimed at reclaiming to cultivation the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, "once the granary of Babylonia," but which "had become barren or unproductive through salination." "For the land to become productive again it must be washed with sweet water from the Tigris and Euphrates, in a process known as leaching, for five to ten years, and the saline water carried away." Hence

the effort to build the Third River, "a drainage canal, 90 meters wide at the surface, eight meters deep, and 36 meters wide at the base." It runs from Mahmudiya, south of Baghdad, "to skirt the al-Hammar marshland and discharge into another drainage project, al-Is-Haqi, at the northern end of the man-made Basra river, which was built during the Iran-Iraq war to replace the Shatt-al-Arab as a shipping lane. Feeding into the Third River is an elaborate network of drainage pipes and channels."

The project was begun in 1953, and, with Dutch, Soviet, and German contractors, was 85% completed by 1992, though most foreign firms had to leave after sanctions were declared in 1990. The Iraqis had no choice but to complete the work themselves, which they did beginning in June 1992,

Iraq's 'Third River' project



“employing 4,500 laborers and 3,000 machines, worth \$2 billion, seized from Russian, East European, Chinese, and Korean firms” who “have been promised compensation.” The project had been given priority, due to its promise of increasing agricultural production, to overcome the dependency on food imports.

The results so far are encouraging: Some 300,000 hectares out of 1.5 million have been reclaimed, and 300,000 more are being treated. Furthermore, the project will open the area up for development and exploitation of its vast oil reserves, reckoned to account for one-third of Iraq’s total reserves, capable of increasing output by 2.5 million barrels per day.

### Big Lies about the project

Two conspiracy theories have been presented to damn the project. One, by Max Van der Stoel, the Dutch U.N. official responsible for investigating Iraqi human rights violations, claims that the river “would drain the marshes and deprive the Marsh Arabs of their natural habitat.” Jansen comments appropriately that this is “an ironic charge from a Dutchman whose country is built on reclaimed land.” Van der Stoel reportedly issued his charges without having even visited the area; he said he “did not have time” to go there.

The same charge is being trumpeted by British press organs, which have launched a virtual crusade to “save the Marsh Arabs.” As Jansen comments, the project will allow the Marsh Arabs to be treated “as human beings who have a place in modern Iraq rather than relegate them to a marshland museum as anthropological specimens.”

The second theory is that the Iraqis want to dry out the swamps to allow army forces to expel the estimated 10,000 dissidents there. In fact, Jansen points out, the lower water level has resulted not from Iraqi machinations, but from the reduced flow of Euphrates water from Turkey into Iraq as a result of Turkey’s new Ataturk Dam, and from increased Iranian utilization of rivers flowing into the marshes. From a military standpoint, the scheme is absurd: “If the Iraqi Army was determined to drive rebels and refugees quickly and easily out of the inaccessible reaches of the marshes, it would simply flood the marshes, using the heavy flow of saline water to do so.” Instead, the Iraqis have built a dike along the Hammar marsh, “to isolate the polluted and brackish but fresh water of the marshes from the heavy saline water in the Third River, thus preserving the wetland ecology and habitat.”

Such an ambitious project represents a threat only insofar as it contributes to rebuilding Iraq, and to bringing it one giant step farther on the road to becoming a model for a successful, Arab industrial state. That, as *EIR* has maintained since the onset of the hostilities, is what the Anglo-American malthusian elite wishes to prevent. One fanatical ecologist in the British press recently noted, that to destroy the Third River, one would need to declare a “no-bulldozer zone,” not a “no-fly zone” in the south. Perhaps that will be next on the U.N. Security Council’s agenda.

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## Italy

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# ‘Corruption scandals’ steered from abroad

by Claudio Celani

On Monday, Jan. 25, the doors of the Milan San Vittore prison swung open to let out Mario Moretti, leader of the Red Brigades, the terrorist organization responsible for murdering tens of Italian institutional leaders in the 1970s. Moretti coordinated the 1978 abduction and assassination of Aldo Moro, the famous Christian Democratic leader whom Moretti personally interrogated for 55 days and ultimately shot. For that and other crimes, Moretti had been sentenced to life in prison; but instead, although he never collaborated with justice and never repented or dissociated himself from his terrorist past, Moretti has been allowed by a court ruling to begin his “reintegration” into society as a free man.

Almost at the same time, while Aldo Moro’s assassin was walking around Milan a free man, the press reported that Moro’s daughter, Maria Fida, a former member of Parliament, has lost her job and is having a hard time finding a new one.

These two images symbolize the dramatic crisis the Italian nation is living through: a country whose institutions are rewarding the assassin of one among its greatest statesmen, while the victim’s children are suffering as outcasts of society.

Aldo Moro was killed because he was pursuing an independent policy for Italy. The Red Brigades commando that killed him was steered from outside, by the same people who today are rewarding Moretti because through all these years he has kept the secret of who really gave the orders to kill Moro.

A lawyer, Nino Marazzita, has pointed out that “Moretti’s privilege is the price of silence.” Marazzita, who was counsel to the Moro family, has stated: “In the Moro case an intervention took place from the Italian, Soviet, and American foreign secret services.” The terrorists, Marazzita says, “never wanted to talk about it, but they must know.”

Who gave the orders to kidnap and kill Moro? Back in 1978 almost all Italian institutions were controlled by people who belonged to a secret lodge, Propaganda 2. P-2 included the heads of the secret services, police, and *carabinieri* (military police) who “could not find” Aldo Moro during his 55-day captivity. The lodge was built by Licio Gelli, a businessman who took orders from Alexander Haig and Henry Kis-