

The Volatile Realities Of Post-War Iraq

by Mark Burdman

EIR had the opportunity to interview Dr. Toby Dodge, Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Globalization and Regionalization, at the University of Warwick. Dodge is one of Britain's leading experts on Iraq. In the period leading up to the Iraq War, he made a number of trenchant critiques of the political and diplomatic behavior of the American and British governments respecting the Iraq crisis. Indeed, if the American government had paid more attention to the warnings from experts like Dr. Dodge, about the realities prevailing in Iraq, U.S. forces might not have ended up in the hot water (and very hot weather) they are in right now.



From May 17-26, Dodge was in Baghdad. The picture he presented to *EIR* was sobering, to put it mildly.

'The Violence Is Very, Very Bad'

Dodge stressed that at this moment in Iraq, respecting the country's population, there is "one point of optimism, but it is the only one." This is the reality that "regime change has happened," and the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime has taken the lid off political discussion and debate, which had been forbidden. As a result, there is "massive political ferment, everyone is discussing and debating, asking what happened all these years, what is happening now."

But beyond this "one point of optimism," the nightmare begins. Dodge stayed with an upper-middle-class Iraqi family, "what might be called the other side of the fence." For this layer of the Iraqi population, the main concern is "the lack of law and order." So concerned was the family, that his hosts forbade Dodge to leave the house after 4:00 in the afternoon. By 7:00 p.m., all the streets of their Baghdad neighborhood were deserted.

What such relatively well-off Baghdad residents fear, is something faced by the entire population: the rampant violence. "The situation is extremely bad, and media reporting of it is only sporadic. . . . The violence is very, very bad," Dodge insisted. According to his report, this violence takes three forms.

One, is "major criminality and banditry," reaching the

point of “organized, industrial-scale looting.” He reported that in 1993-94, there had been a serious emergence of organized crime in Iraq, but this had been suppressed in the 1997-98 period. Now, it is back, with a vengeance.

A second form is “minor criminality,” such as car-jacking, looting of private houses, and the like. One disturbing, and growing, form of criminality, “the most sensational,” is the kidnapping of young girls, who are sold into prostitution. This is all the worse, as Iraq is an overwhelmingly Islamic country, so this carries an added stigma of opprobrium and shame.

The third variant is “counter-American violence.” Here again, Dodge noted, there are three forms. One kind is what can be described as “opportunistic thuggery,” whereby attacks are carried out against American soldiers, vehicles, and/or installations, with “no apparent motive.” A second element comprises attacks by remnants of the old regime, and/or Saddam loyalists who are members of, or linked to Saddam’s Tikriti clan. “This is a rump group, and they have nothing to lose.”

But it is the third type, “the most worrying,” which carries with it by far the most danger and risk, for the occupying forces. This is “nationalist violence.” Dodge pointed to the case of Falluja, west of Baghdad, the scene of a number of recent highly publicized confrontations between American forces and Iraqi demonstrators. “What we see in Falluja, is a nationalist campaign beginning, to get rid of the American forces. What has to be understood about Falluja, is that it was never a Ba’athist stronghold. Rather, it is a stronghold of conservative religious Sunni Islam. What is coming together there, is nationalism and political Islam. This could be very difficult for the Americans.”

He reported that, for the British forces in the south, in and around Basra, the situation is somewhat better. There is less random violence than in Baghdad, and the British military acts in a “less intrusive way than the Americans,” so this engenders less popular resentment. However, Dodge noted that in the south as well, political unrest and activity is increasing; he was speaking to *EIR* before the June 24 attacks on British military teams there.

This latter observation of Dodge had already been bolstered by a number of reports in the British media, beginning mid-June, of large-scale political demonstrations, and other manifestations of opposition, in Basra.

‘Summer Will Be the Most Difficult Time’

Dodge was asked, how he evaluated the American occupation, and its ability to manage and control such a situation. He replied: “It is now getting hotter and hotter in Iraq. There is only sporadic electricity. Tempers are getting shorter. My sense is that the Americans are massively understaffed, and very divided from the society. They are flushing out the Tikriti clan, in operations against their strongholds to the north and west of Baghdad. They can break them, roll it up, and we see they have captured the No. 4 on the ‘Wanted’ list. But the

way this is being done, is breeding resentment in the broader population.

“The bigger problem, is that the more sustainable opposition is the nationalist opposition, and my sense is that the United States doesn’t have the intelligence on the ground, to know what is going on, and to stop the violence. This is, potentially, a huge problem.”

Asked how he expected this situation to unfold in the weeks and months to come, Dodge replied: “We are now entering Summer, July-August. This will be the most difficult time. The feeling is growing among many Iraqis, that the Americans are not strong enough to dominate the country, and that the American presence is temporary, and that the Americans can be chased out. The violence will increase, directed at the United States. More U.S. troops, sadly, will be killed. This will have domestic repercussions; we already see that happening in the United States. How will the Americans be able to sustain the level of casualties that will occur? And this is the time when the 2004 Presidential election campaign is beginning.”

In Dodge’s view, the controversy over growing numbers of casualties in Iraq intersects two other factors. One, is that in the United States, there are indications of a popular backlash emerging against the project of neo-conservative strategists, most clearly enunciated by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, for what Dodge calls “permanent revolution.” They want to cause “transformations” inside Middle Eastern nations, with Iran the most likely next target, and then throughout the developing world, to “impose rules” favorable to the neo-cons’ overall agenda. Dodge sees this as “highly destabilizing,” and is convinced that “the American population is not up for it,” because of the vast amount of money and troops it would require to actually carry it out.

The other factor is the continuing controversy over alleged “Iraqi weapons of weapons destruction,” with serious charges being made, both in America and Britain, that the Bush and Blair regimes falsified intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and thereby misled the American and British populations into war. Dodge thinks it wrong to assert categorically, as some have, that there are *no* such weapons; he believes there are almost certainly some, and that the investigators now operating on the ground “could find something” and use this to rebut the charges.

However, whatever might be found, Dodge says, would be “much, much, much less than we were led to believe. . . . If [former chief United Nations weapons inspector] Scott Ritter is right, when he said recently that Iraq has 2% of what it had in 1990, then clearly that posed no direct threat. This keeps the question very much alive: what was this war about, and why was it fought? And the reason the issue of Iraqi WMD is now so high-profile, here in Britain, is because there is a lot of resentment and unease about the war, and anger that Blair drove the country into war on the basis of allegations that were not true. This issue will not go away.”