
Interview: Mahmoud Dhiyab al-Ahmed

The new phase for Iraq is to construct new buildings

Muriel Mirak-Weissbach conducted the following interview with Iraqi Minister for Housing and Reconstruction, Mahmoud Dhiyab al-Ahmed, in Baghdad, Iraq on July 21.

EIR: President Saddam Hussein, in his speech on July 17, said that the embargo would not be lifted by a U.N. decision, but that it would disintegrate, as a result of Iraq's own economic recovery. Does this mean a shift toward autarky?

Al-Ahmed: Although, since I am an engineer, I am not responsible for the policy, I will answer. The reconstruction projects referred to in the speech are now old for Iraq. The new phase for Iraq is to construct new buildings. The projects which were destroyed by the Americans have been nearly all reconstructed. About 90% have been reconstructed. The remaining 10% is under construction, so we have achieved a good percentage of rebuilding. We hope that, by the end of this year, we will have finished all these projects.

But there are new projects, which did not exist before the war—for example, a new river on which construction has begun, and which will be finished in a few months. Foreign companies would have taken years to complete it. Another great project concerns the water supply for Basrah, another involves an irrigation system for the north of Iraq. Our ministry is mobilized now for a big popular housing project for Baghdad. Yesterday, we laid the cornerstone for a new factory, for production of medicines, in the Abu Rehd area. So you can recognize that Iraq—and this is the aim of His Excellency President Saddam Hussein—is not losing any time without building and constructing new projects. We don't have any problems with rebuilding those projects that were destroyed, we don't have problems with new buildings, but we have problems because of the embargo, because of the shortage of material needed for construction.

The Iraqi people are suffering from the embargo, because of the lack of food and medicine. The U.N. decision, which we believe is an American decision, is to withhold medicine and food, which should be allowed. But this is in front of the world, and everyone sees that it is not right that Iraq is not allowed to export oil to buy food and medicine for people. All accounts outside Iraq are frozen. So how can we bring

these things, food and medicines? I heard from the minister of health in Iraq, there is a special kind of capsule needed for heart patients, which was blocked because of a substance inside it which can be used in the chemical industry. And by their own calculations, we would need a billion such capsules, to extract a small quantity of this substance. Do you believe that we would let sick people suffer from their illnesses to get this material for the chemical industry? H.E. President Saddam Hussein mentioned the pencils in his speech [for school children, which were not allowed in, because the lead was deemed capable of dual use]. Can you imagine how evil, how shallow-minded the Americans are?

Now to the point you raised at the beginning: how the Iraqi people can destroy the embargo. There are big new construction projects going on and an "agricultural revolution," which will yield a very big wheat harvest this year. It is this, in fact, which led the Americans to burn the wheat crops in northern Iraq. Is it right for human beings to let the Americans burn the food of Iraq? Is that "American civilization"? I believe that human beings throughout the world, one day, will realize that the American and U.N. decision should be revoked.

The Iraqi people, as Muslims, believe in the Koran; we believe that there is a God and that there is a mission for people. Who would have thought the Iraqis could have withstood the embargo a year and a half and rebuilt so much? I often ask journalists from abroad what they think before they come to Iraq, and their answer is they expected to see people living in the streets, everything destroyed. The fact is that the Americans did destroy everything, but the Iraqi character and the policy of H.E. President Saddam Hussein have made it possible to rebuild. You can tell from your visit to the museum, because you see how much was destroyed and how much has been reconstructed.

EIR: You mentioned medicine and food. Iraq was dependent on imports for 70% of its food supply, it imported enormous amounts of medicines and medical equipment. Do you have plans for developing these industries, to overcome the dependency on imports?

Al-Ahmed: On medicine, the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Industry know the facts on whether our production will satisfy demand or not. As for agriculture, everyone in Iraq is farming now. You can see that we are not going to leave any arable land uncultivated. This is the role of the new project, the third river project, which will be used for land reclamation, and to clean out the salt deposits. Furthermore, after three to four years we can use the water from this river also for irrigation.

EIR: The picture you are painting is one of an Iraq which will resume its role as technological leader in the region. Are there discussions going on regarding what this new industrialization thrust can contribute to the region? Have there been discussions with Arab neighbors on regional projects?

Al-Ahmed: I cannot say anything about such discussions, if they have taken place, but I can speak as one of the Iraqi people. Let me ask you about Japan and Germany after the Second World War. There are a lot of foreigners who think Iraq will become the "Japan of the Middle East" in the future. The embargo is very hard. But the lesson we have drawn from it is very big for Iraq: Have confidence in yourself, think of creating new things. It is no secret, that we publish in our press, that we have a lot of industrial projects for peaceful purposes.

EIR: In the U.S., the economy has been destroyed, not by war, but by Bush's policies. They say they cannot invest because there is no money. The same is said in Europe. How has it been possible to finance these great projects?

Al-Ahmed: First of all, all these projects have been financed from Iraq.

EIR: With what credit mechanisms?

Al-Ahmed: All the money is Iraqi, we don't have and don't need foreign currency for internal credit. The people and the materials are Iraqi. It is a very important point to keep in mind, that no matter how long the embargo lasts, they cannot forget Iraq. They cannot last without Iraqi oil forever. Iraq is the second largest oil producer. How many countries have three great rivers? Tigris, Euphrates, and the new one. What country has such a land area, and such a great people suffering from the embargo, yet working day and night. Does Bush have the same courage as our President, Saddam Hussein? No, Bush definitely does not. Before the war, Saddam Hussein asked Bush to do a television debate, and Bush refused, because he is not able to. Because his aim was to destroy Iraq. I believe that Bush destroyed the American people. Secondly, Bush makes enemies of all Arab peoples because of his destruction of Iraq. And he can win very few Arab people to his cause, and we believe they are not really Arabs, like Hosni [Mubarak], and [Saudi King] Fahd. This you hear from the people of Sudan, Yemen, Morocco, North Africa, the Egyptian people (not Hosni), the Syrian people (not As-

sad), the Palestinians and many other Arabs. But we find a lot of honest people in America, there are a lot completely against this. We believe that Bush will not win the next election, we hope he will not win.

EIR: Perhaps this is a good occasion to show you this book, just issued by *EIR*, *George Bush, The Unauthorized Biography*, written after the Gulf war, to explain how such an atrocity could come about.

Al-Ahmed: We are very happy, there are a lot of books on the war.

EIR: This is unique, drawing on documents never published before. But perhaps you want to say this off the record.

Al-Ahmed: Oh, no, no, no! We are not afraid of Bush! . . . We Iraqis actually do not care who is going to be the American President, we think the Zionists own every President. But if there is any good man, honest man, we are glad to see him fight the establishment. We have experience with leaders, European and American, and have seen that they are different if in government or in the opposition.

EIR: Thank you very much.

Al-Ahmed: I hope the next time you visit Iraq, you will see still something else.

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